



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



THURSDAY — 29 SEP 2022

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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	09/29 Florida sheriff: hundreds feared dead
SOURCE	https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2022/09/29/hurricane-ian-live-updates-damage-forecast-florida/10457271002/

GIST	<p>Hundreds were feared dead Thursday and thousands of Floridians desperately sought rescue as historically powerful Hurricane Ian hammered the state with heavy rain and strong winds, one of the strongest storms in U.S. history.</p> <p>The hurricane's center made landfall as a Category 4 monster Wednesday afternoon near Cayo Costa, a barrier island just west of heavily populated Fort Myers in Lee County.</p> <p>"While I don't have confirmed numbers, I definitely know the fatalities are in the hundreds," Lee County Sheriff Carmine Marceno said on ABC-TV's "Good Morning America." "There are thousands of people that are waiting to be rescued."</p> <p>Pressed on the numbers, Marceno said "so far confirmed in the hundreds. Meaning that we are responding to events, drownings. Again, unsure of the exact details because we are just starting to scratch the surface on this assessment."</p> <p>Emergency crews sawed through toppled trees to reach people in flooded homes. "If the line is busy, keep trying," Marceno said in a Facebook post early Thursday.</p> <p>More than 2.5 Florida million homes and business were without power early Thursday.</p> <p>Ian had weakened to a tropical storm but was forecast to continue roaring across the state most of the day before heading out into the Atlantic. The storm flooded entire communities, leaving residents stranded in their homes with battering 150-mph maximum sustained winds – just 7 mph shy of a Category 5 hurricane, the strongest on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane scale.</p> <p>Meteorologists with the National Hurricane Center said Ian will then turn northwest and strengthen to hurricane status before making landfall again in South Carolina.</p> <p>The storm previously tore into Cuba, killing two people and bringing down the country's electrical grid. No injuries or deaths have been reported in Florida.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Germany, Japan in joint military drills
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/09/28/Germany-Japan-Australia/8501664388486/
GIST	<p>Sept. 28 (UPI) -- Germany and Japan conducted their first joint military drills on Wednesday in Japan, as Berlin seeks to expand its security commitments in the region.</p> <p>Three F-2 fighter jets from Japan's Air Self-Defense Force and three German Eurofighter jets participated in formation training to improve communication and tactical skills. The drills, which last until Friday, took place at the Hyakuri Air Base near Tokyo.</p> <p>According to the Global Times, analysts said that the exercises would help boost Germany's joint air combat capabilities in the Asia-Pacific region.</p> <p>German Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht told the Japan Times that Berlin would see a continuous security commitment to the region.</p> <p>"The military buildup in the region is picking up speed, geopolitical tensions are exacerbating territorial conflicts and the risk of escalation is increasing," she said. "We are aware that Euro-Atlantic security and Indo-Pacific security are connected. That is why we want to help maintain peace and stability in this important region."</p> <p>The Japan Times also reported that some critics have argued that developments in China and North Korea pose little or no direct security threat to Germany. However, Lambrecht said that given the Indo-</p>

	<p>Pacific region's economic and geopolitical importance to both Germany and the whole of Europe, "any conflict there would affect Germany massively, in multiple ways."</p> <p>Wednesday's exercises are not Germany's first in the region. The German Air Force took part in military exercises in Australia earlier this month.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/29 How CIA failed Iranian informants
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-spies-iran/
GIST	<p>The spy was minutes from leaving Iran when he was nabbed.</p> <p>Gholamreza Hosseini was at Imam Khomeini Airport in Tehran in late 2010, preparing for a flight to Bangkok. There, the Iranian industrial engineer would meet his Central Intelligence Agency handlers. But before he could pay his exit tax to leave the country, the airport ATM machine rejected his card as invalid. Moments later, a security officer asked to see Hosseini's passport before escorting him away.</p> <p>Hosseini said he was brought to an empty VIP lounge and told to sit on a couch that had been turned to face a wall. Left alone for a dizzying few moments and not seeing any security cameras, Hosseini thrust his hand into his trouser pocket, fishing out a memory card full of state secrets that could now get him hanged. He shoved the card into his mouth, chewed it to pieces and swallowed.</p> <p>Not long after, Ministry of Intelligence agents entered the room and the interrogation began, punctuated by beatings, Hosseini recounted. His denials and the destruction of the data were worthless; they seemed to know everything already. But how?</p> <p>"These are things I never told anyone in the world," Hosseini told Reuters. As his mind raced, Hosseini even wondered whether the CIA itself had sold him out.</p> <p>Rather than betrayal, Hosseini was the victim of CIA negligence, a year-long Reuters investigation into the agency's handling of its informants found. A faulty CIA covert communications system made it easy for Iranian intelligence to identify and capture him. Jailed for nearly a decade and speaking out for the first time, Hosseini said he never heard from the agency again, even after he was released in 2019.</p> <p>The CIA declined to comment on Hosseini's account.</p> <p>Hosseini's experience of sloppy handling and abandonment was not unique. In interviews with six Iranian former CIA informants, Reuters found that the agency was careless in other ways amid its intense drive to gather intelligence in Iran, putting in peril those risking their lives to help the United States.</p> <p>One informant said the CIA instructed him to make his information drops in Turkey at a location the agency knew was under surveillance by Iran. Another man, a former government worker who traveled to Abu Dhabi to seek a U.S. visa, claims a CIA officer there tried unsuccessfully to push him into spying for the United States, leading to his arrest when he returned to Iran.</p> <p>Such aggressive steps by the CIA sometimes put average Iranians in danger with little prospect of gaining critical intelligence. When these men were caught, the agency provided no assistance to the informants or their families, even years later, the six Iranians said.</p> <p>James Olson, former chief of CIA counterintelligence, said he was unaware of these specific cases. But he said any unnecessary compromise of sources by the agency would represent both a professional and ethical failure.</p> <p>"If we're careless, if we're reckless and we've been penetrated, then shame on us," Olson said. "If people paid the price of trusting us enough to share information and they paid a penalty, then we have failed morally."</p>

The men were jailed as part of an aggressive counterintelligence purge by Iran that began in 2009, a campaign partly enabled by a series of CIA blunders, according to news reports and three former U.S. national security officials. Tehran has claimed in state media reports that its mole hunt ultimately netted dozens of CIA informants.

To tell this story, Reuters conducted dozens of hours of interviews with the six Iranians who were convicted of espionage by their government between 2009 and 2015.

To vet their accounts, Reuters interviewed 10 former U.S. intelligence officials with knowledge of Iran operations; reviewed Iranian government records and news reports; and interviewed people who knew the spies.

None of the former or current U.S. officials who spoke with Reuters confirmed or disclosed the identities of any CIA sources.

The CIA declined to comment specifically on Reuters' findings or on the intelligence agency's operations in Iran. A spokeswoman said the CIA does its utmost to safeguard people who work with the agency.

Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its Mission to the United Nations in New York did not respond to requests for comment.

Hosseini was the only one of the six men Reuters interviewed who said he was assigned the vulnerable messaging tool. But an analysis by two independent cybersecurity specialists found that the now-defunct covert online communication system that Hosseini used – located by Reuters in an internet archive – may have exposed at least 20 other Iranian spies and potentially hundreds of other informants operating in other countries around the world.

This messaging platform, which operated until 2013, was hidden within rudimentary news and hobby websites where spies could go to connect with the CIA. Reuters confirmed its existence with four former U.S. officials.

These failures continue to haunt the agency years later. In a series of internal cables last year, CIA leadership warned that it had [lost most of its network of spies in Iran](#) and that [sloppy tradecraft continues to endanger](#) the agency's mission worldwide, the New York Times reported.

The CIA considers Iran one of its most difficult targets. Ever since Iranian students seized the American embassy in Tehran in 1979, the United States has had no diplomatic presence in the country. CIA officers are instead forced to recruit potential agents outside Iran or through online connections. The thin local presence leaves U.S. intelligence at a disadvantage amid events such as the [protests now sweeping Iran](#) over the death of a woman arrested for violating the country's religious dress code.

Four former intelligence officers interviewed by Reuters said the agency is willing to take bigger risks with sources when it comes to spying on Iran. Curbing the Islamic Republic's nuclear ambitions has long been a priority in Washington. Tehran insists its nuclear efforts are solely for energy needs.

"This is a very serious, very serious intelligence goal to penetrate Iran's nuclear weapons program. You don't get a much higher priority than that," said James Lawler, a former CIA officer whose focus included weapons of mass destruction and Iran. "So when they do the risk-versus-gain analysis, you've got to consider the incredible amount of gain."

Much has been written about the decades-long shadow war between Iran and Washington, in which both sides have avoided a full military confrontation but have carried out sabotage, assassinations and cyberattacks. But the six informants, interviewed by Reuters for the first time, gave an unprecedented firsthand account of the deadly spy game from the perspective of Iranians who served as CIA foot soldiers.

The six Iranians served prison terms ranging from five to 10 years. Four of them, including Hosseini, stayed in Iran after their release and remain vulnerable to rearrest. Two fled the country and have become stateless refugees.

The six men acknowledged that their CIA handlers never made firm promises to help if they were caught. Still, all had believed that U.S. assistance would one day come.

The espionage busts could pose a challenge to the CIA's credibility as it seeks to rebuild its spy network in Iran. The country's state media publicized some of these cases, portraying the agency as feckless and inept.

"It's a stain on the U.S. government," Hosseini told Reuters.

CIA spokeswoman Tammy Kupperman Thorp declined to comment on Hosseini, the cases of other captured Iranians or any aspect of how the agency conducts operations. But she said the CIA would never be careless with the lives of those who help the agency.

"CIA takes its obligations to protect the people that work with us very seriously and we know that many do so bravely at great personal risk," Thorpe said. "The notion that CIA would not work as hard as possible to safeguard them is false."

An angry volunteer

Hosseini's leap to espionage came after he had climbed a steep path to a lucrative career. The son of a tailor, he grew up in Tehran and learned lathing and auto mechanics, he said, showing Reuters his trade-school diploma.

Along the way, teachers spotted Hosseini's intelligence and pushed him to study industrial engineering at the prestigious Amirkabir University of Technology, he said. Hosseini said a professor there put him in touch with a former student with ties to the Iranian government who eventually became his business partner.

Founded in 2001, their engineering company provided services to help businesses optimize energy consumption. The firm at first worked mainly with food and steel factories, Hosseini said, over time scoring contracts with Iran's energy and defense industries. Hosseini's account of his professional background is confirmed in corporate records, Iranian media accounts and interviews with six associates.

Hosseini said the company's success made his family affluent, allowing him to buy a large house, drive imported cars and go on foreign vacations. But in the years after the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who served from 2005 to 2013, his business teetered.

Under Ahmadinejad, a hardliner aligned with the country's theocratic ruler, Iran's security forces were encouraged to enter the industrial sector, increasing the military's control over lucrative commercial projects. Established companies often found themselves relegated to the role of subcontractors for these newcomers, Iranian democracy activists said, shrinking their slice of the pie.

Before long, Hosseini said, all of his new contracts had to be routed through some of these firms, forcing him to lay off workers as earnings tumbled.

"They didn't know how to do the work, but they took the lion's share of the profits," said Hosseini, his voice rising as he recounted the events a decade later. "It was as if you were the head of the company, doing everything from 0 to 100, and seeing your salary being given to the most junior employees. I felt raped."

At the same time, U.S. rhetoric was ramping up against Ahmadinejad. Washington viewed Iran's president as a dangerous provocateur set on building nuclear weapons. Hosseini began to feel that his life was being

destroyed by a corrupt system, and that the government was too erratic to be allowed to obtain nukes. His anger grew.

One day in 2007, he said he opened the CIA public website and clicked the link to contact the agency: “I’m an engineer who has worked at the nuclear site Natanz and I have information,” he wrote in Persian.

Located 200 miles south of Tehran, Natanz is a major facility for uranium enrichment. Archived web records from Hosseini’s engineering firm from 2007 say the company worked on civilian electrical power projects. Reuters could not independently confirm Hosseini’s work at Natanz.

A month later, to his surprise, Hosseini said he received an email back from the CIA.

Part of the team?

Three months after that contact, Hosseini said he flew to Dubai. At the fashionable shopping market Souk Madinat Jumeirah, he looked for a blonde woman holding a black book. He was standing outside the restaurant where they had agreed to meet, when she arrived accompanied by a man.

The restaurant manager guided them to a table secluded in a corner. The woman introduced herself only as Chris, speaking in English while her colleague translated in Persian. As she sipped a glass of champagne, Chris told him they were the people Hosseini had been exchanging messages with over the past few months in Google’s chat platform. She asked Hosseini about his work.

Hosseini said he explained that his company had several years earlier worked on contracts to optimize the flow of electricity at the Natanz site, a complex balancing act to keep centrifuges spinning at precisely the speed needed to enrich uranium. Located in central Iran, Natanz was the heart of Tehran’s nuclear program, which the government said was to produce civilian electricity. But Washington saw Natanz as the core of Iran’s push to acquire nuclear weapons.

Hosseini told Chris his firm was a subcontractor of Kalaye Electric, a company [sanctioned](#) in 2007 by the U.S. government over its alleged role in Iran’s nuclear development program. He added that he was seeking additional contracts at other sensitive nuclear and military sites.

Kalaye Electric did not respond to requests for comment.

The next day the three met again, this time at Hosseini’s hotel room overlooking the Gulf. Hosseini unfurled a maze-like map across the desk showing the electricity connected to the Natanz nuclear facility. As he did, Chris’s mouth dropped open wide, Hosseini recalled.

While several years old, Hosseini explained, the map’s notations of the amount of power flowing into the facility provided Washington a baseline to estimate the number of centrifuges currently active. That evidence, he believed, could be used to assess progress toward processing the highly enriched uranium needed for a nuclear weapon.

Hosseini said he didn’t know it at the time, but Natanz was already in the crosshairs of U.S. authorities. That same year, Washington and Israel [launched a cyberweapon](#) that would sabotage those very centrifuges, infecting them with a virus that would cripple uranium enrichment at Natanz for years to come, security analysts concluded. Reuters could not determine whether the information provided by Hosseini assisted in that cyber sabotage or other operations.

In subsequent meetings, Hosseini said, the CIA asked him to turn his attention to a broader U.S. goal: identifying possible critical points in Iran’s national electric grid that would cause long and paralyzing blackouts if struck by a missile or saboteurs.

Hosseini said he continued to meet with the CIA in Thailand and Malaysia, in a total of seven meetings over three years. To show evidence of his travels, Hosseini provided photographs of entry stamps in his passport for all but his first two trips, for which he said he had used an older, now discarded, passport.

As the relationship progressed, Hosseini said, Chris was replaced with a male handler who was accompanied by officials described as more senior in the CIA's Iran operations, as well as technical experts able to keep up with his engineering jargon.

The new role motivated Hosseini, injecting his work with a sense of urgency and purpose. He scrambled to win business that would give him greater access to the intelligence the CIA sought. He said his company secured a contract with a unit of Setad, the sprawling business conglomerate controlled by Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, to assess the electrical needs of a giant shopping and commercial building project in the north of Tehran.

Representing the supreme leader's commercial organization, Hosseini pushed the state power company Tavanir for the electricity the sprawling development required, Hosseini said. When Tavanir said it didn't have enough electricity to meet the project's giant demands, Hosseini asked the company to provide in-depth analyses of the national grid. This allowed him access to maps showing how electricity flowed to nuclear and military sites and how critical points of the network could be sabotaged.

Setad and Tavanir did not respond to requests for comment.

In August 2008, a year after becoming a spy, Hosseini said he met with an older, broad-shouldered CIA officer and others at a hotel in Dubai.

Gholamreza Hosseini says a CIA officer purchased this stuffed bear for his daughter as a birthday gift. "We need to expand the commitment," Hosseini recounted the officer saying. The officer handed Hosseini a piece of paper and asked him to write a promise that he would not provide the information he was sharing to another government, a CIA practice intended to deepen a feeling of commitment from an informant, two former CIA officials said.

Another CIA officer in the meeting then showed Hosseini a covert communications system he could use to reach his handlers: a rudimentary Persian-language soccer news website called Iraniangoals.com. Entering a password into the search bar caused a secret messaging window to pop up, allowing Hosseini to send information and receive instructions from the CIA.

When Hosseini lamented missing his daughter's third birthday during one of the trips, he said a CIA officer bought him a teddy bear to give to the child. "I felt that I had joined the team," Hosseini told Reuters.

Secret system breakdown

What Hosseini didn't know was that the world's most powerful intelligence agency had given him a tool that likely led to his capture. In 2018, [Yahoo News reported](#) that a flawed web-based covert communications system had led to the arrest and execution of dozens of CIA informants in Iran and China.

Reuters located the secret CIA communications site identified by Hosseini, Iraniangoals.com, in an internet archive where it remains publicly available. Reuters then asked two independent cyber analysts – Bill Marczak of University of Toronto's Citizen Lab, and Zach Edwards of Victory Medium – to probe how Iran may have used weaknesses in the CIA's own technology to unmask Hosseini and other CIA informants. The two are experts on privacy and cybersecurity, with experience analyzing electronic intelligence operations. The effort represents the first independent technical analysis of the intelligence failure.

Marczak and Edwards quickly discovered that the secret messaging window hidden inside Iraniangoals.com could be spotted by simply right-clicking on the page to bring up the website's coding. This code contained descriptions of secret functions, including the words "message" and "compose" – easily found clues that a messaging capability had been built into the site. The coding for the search bar that triggered the secret messaging software was labeled "password."

Far from being customized, high-end spycraft, Iraniangoals.com was one of hundreds of websites mass-produced by the CIA to give to its sources, the independent analysts concluded. These rudimentary sites were devoted to topics such as beauty, fitness and entertainment, among them a Star Wars fan page and another for the late American talk show host Johnny Carson.

Each fake website was assigned to only one spy in order to limit exposure of the entire network in case any single agent was captured, two former CIA officials told Reuters.

But the CIA made identifying those sites easy, the independent analysts said. Marczak located more than 350 websites containing the same secret messaging system, all of which have been offline for at least nine years and archived. Edwards confirmed his findings and methodology. Online records they analyzed reveal the hosting space for these front websites was often purchased in bulk by the dozen, often from the same internet providers, on the same server space. The result was that numerical identifiers, or IP addresses, for many of these websites were sequential, much like houses on the same street.

“The CIA really failed with this,” said Marczak, the Citizen Lab researcher. The covert messaging system, he said, “stuck out like a sore thumb.”

In addition, some sites bore strikingly similar names. For example, while Hosseini was communicating with the CIA through Iraniangoals.com, a site named Iraniangoalkicks.com was built for another informant. At least two dozen of the 350-plus sites produced by the CIA appeared to be messaging platforms for Iranian operatives, the analysts found.

All told, these features meant the discovery of a single spy using one of these websites would have allowed Iranian intelligence to uncover additional pages used by other CIA informants. Once those sites were identified, nabbing the operatives using them would have been simple: The Iranians just had to wait and see who showed up. In essence, the CIA used the same row of bushes for its informants worldwide. Any attentive espionage rival would have been able to spot them all, the analysts said.

This vulnerability went far beyond Iran. Written in various languages, the websites appeared to be a conduit for CIA communications with operatives in at least 20 countries, among them China, Brazil, Russia, Thailand and Ghana, the analysts found.

CIA spokeswoman Thorp declined to comment on the system.

Reuters confirmed the nature of the intelligence failure of the CIA’s cookie-cutter websites with three former national security officials.

The agency wasn’t fully aware that this system had been compromised until 2013, after many of its agents began to go missing, according to the former U.S. officials.

Still, the CIA had never considered the network safe enough for its most prized sources. Top-tier informants receive custom-made covert communications tools, built from scratch at agency headquarters in Langley, Virginia, to seamlessly blend into the life of a spy without drawing attention, three former CIA officers said.

The mass-produced sites, they said, were for sources who were either not considered fully vetted or had limited, albeit potentially valuable, access to state secrets.

“This is for a person viewed as not worth the investment of advanced tradecraft,” one of the former CIA officials said.

The CIA declined to comment on the covert communications system and the intelligence failure.

Caste system for spies

“We will go to hell and back to protect our sources,” said Lawler, the former CIA officer.

It's a common refrain from agency veterans. But it sometimes comes with an asterisk.

Some former intelligence officers privately acknowledge that the CIA protects its informants on a sliding scale based on the perceived worth of the spy, an ever-shifting assessment almost never fully explained to the source.

At the top of the pyramid are what the CIA calls "fully recruited, highly vetted assets." These are people such as high-level government officials or nuclear scientists who have direct, continued access to critical secrets. CIA officers sometimes spend years trying to lure these key operatives into becoming agents.

If the officer succeeds in the recruitment – and gets the blessing of headquarters – the newly minted agent is put on CIA books with a regular CIA paycheck. Such spies are sometimes issued the kinds of ingenious gadgets and training that are the stuff of Hollywood legend. If a highly vetted asset is captured, the loss reverberates at the top levels of the CIA. The CIA will sometimes track down the child or spouse of an executed agent years afterward to offer million-dollar compensation and a discreetly marked agency medal to commemorate the sacrifice, former officers said.

But a lot of the intelligence the CIA gathers comes from low-level informants who never become "full-fledged members of the roster of spies," said Paul Pillar, a 28-year veteran of the U.S. intelligence community, mainly at the CIA, where he worked as a senior analyst on the Middle East.

Such informants – sometimes disgruntled ex-officials or spurned lovers – may have just fragments of a bigger secret the agency seeks to uncover.

"You take what you can get," Pillar said.

These sources often receive less protection than a high-level asset, no regular payments and usually no commitment of CIA help if they get caught, former CIA officers said.

Inside Iran, the CIA placed low-level informants at dire risk, interviews with six of the former spies revealed. The spies knew they were jeopardizing their lives when they gave information to the United States and said the agency didn't make any promises about their security. In interviews with Reuters, however, the men repeatedly stated their belief that the CIA would do its best to protect them.

One of these men, Mohammad Aghaei, said he mulled going to the CIA for years before he acted.

Aghaei is a former longtime member of the Basij, a religious paramilitary organization that violently suppressed student pro-democracy demonstrations in the late 1990s and 2000s. He said he became disaffected by how Khamenei used religious ideology to preserve power. Aghaei wanted to support the Iranian dissidents he had seen attacked in the streets, he said, and thought America might help.

Mohammad Aghaei in 2018 in Turkey, where he lived for a time as a refugee. He fled Iran after serving nearly six years in prison for espionage after providing information to the CIA. Handout via REUTERS
Years later, Aghaei came up with a plan to ask the CIA for financial support for a well-known Iranian dissident, the son of a prominent cleric, whom he knew. In 2011, he flew to Istanbul, took a taxi to the consulate, and told the security guard he wanted to talk to the CIA.

Aghaei's description of his initial vetting at the consulate closely matches what former U.S. officials told Reuters was standard procedure for handling such a "walk-in" looking to connect with the CIA.

He said he was first strip-searched by uniformed guards, then brought to another room. There Aghaei was questioned for several hours about his background and motives by a diplomatic security official who frequently left the room only to return with further questions.

The Iranian said he did ultimately meet with a CIA officer that day. But she wasn't interested in supporting the dissident. Instead, she was more drawn to Aghaei's family ties to Iranian security forces. Aghaei had disclosed that he had relatives working in the Intelligence Ministry as well as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, an elite branch of the military. The CIA officer offered to reimburse him for his trip, then proposed a small mission for him to prove himself.

Aghaei said she asked him to use his family connections to gather information on the Quds Force, an arm of the Revolutionary Guards that operates abroad, including names, phone numbers and addresses of senior commanders. He was provided no training in how to avoid detection, nor given a covert way of contacting the CIA officer, he said.

He was told simply to show up again at the Istanbul consulate once he'd completed his task, and given \$2,000 to cover his travel costs. Aghaei said he returned to Turkey a few months later to share the information he'd gathered. The same CIA officer prepped him for another mission. But after returning to Iran in December 2011, he was soon captured.

"We know you have had meetings at the consulate," an Intelligence Ministry interrogator said following the arrest, Aghaei recounted to Reuters.

He knew he was taking a risk – but not the full extent of it. The CIA had learned a year earlier from phone intercepts that Iranian operatives were surveilling the consulate, hunting for turncoats such as Aghaei, according to a former U.S official with direct knowledge of the situation.

Why, then, bring Aghaei back to the consulate when the CIA was aware it was being monitored? A veteran senior CIA intelligence officer said such a scenario is born from the reality that most volunteers ultimately fail to produce valuable intelligence and are often double agents. Prior to a meeting with a source outside the station, a CIA officer may spend hours walking around a city to evade any tails, the former officer explained. Sometimes that's considered too much hassle and risk to take for a new volunteer, he said.

Aghaei spent almost six years in Tehran's Evin prison on espionage charges, according to judicial records, fellow prisoners and Iranian media accounts.

The CIA declined to comment on whether it knew that the Iranians allegedly were surveilling the U.S. consulate, nor would it say whether it had met with Aghaei. Reuters could not independently confirm Aghaei's account of the meetings.

He spoke to Reuters from refugee centers where he fled following his release, first in Turkey, then in Switzerland.

Visa ploy

Not all informants are volunteers. The CIA at times pressures, even deceives, Iranians hoping to secure U.S. visas into providing intelligence when they apply at consulates in the United Arab Emirates or Turkey, according to five former U.S. national security officials.

After an Iranian drops off an application, diplomatic officers are instructed to examine whether their employment history or family ties could make them valuable. A few days later, a promising applicant might receive a phone call asking them to return to the consulate to answer more detailed questions.

As CIA officers, posing as consular officers, reel the applicant into increasingly probing meetings, they hold out the possibility that the visa application will be approved, according to the national security officials, all of whom were directly involved in such practices. By the time the Iranian realizes he has given information to an intelligence officer, the unwitting informant has often made disclosures that could land him in jail.

Such was the case with one of the Iranians who spoke to Reuters. A retired Iranian official, he had recently started a travel agency when he flew to Abu Dhabi with his wife in 2011 in order to visit the U.S. embassy there. The travel agent had just won the U.S. green card lottery and believed this huge stroke of luck would allow him to expand his tourism business.

The entrepreneur was at first excited to be invited to a series of interviews over the course of several trips to Abu Dhabi. He said he met inside and outside the embassy with a U.S. consular officer who said his name was Steve. Beyond offering to help complete the immigration screening process, the American official said he could help smooth the way for the man's Iranian customers to receive visas to the United States.

But over time, their conversations pivoted from the travel agent's future in the United States to requests by Steve for sensitive information about Iran's aviation and defense sectors, the Iranian said.

Recognizing the potential danger he was now in if Iranian authorities found out, he said he cut his contact with Steve, likely a pseudonym, and gave up on his dream to reside in the United States. But he was arrested in 2015 in Iran by the intelligence officials who somehow had learned of the liaison. Would he work for Tehran as a double agent, his Iranian interrogators asked, to learn more about how the CIA recruits spies?

He declined the offer and was sentenced to 10 years in prison, serving seven years before obtaining early release in 2022. "We feel as if we had been played with by both sides," his wife told Reuters.

The man never recovered his travel business and has struggled to find work in Iran since his release in 2021. Even ridesharing apps rejected his applications to become a driver, likely because of his conviction, the former travel agent said.

Reuters could not independently confirm the Iranian's interactions with the CIA. The man provided travel records and correspondence with the embassy to support his story. Reuters independently contacted another former prisoner who said he had met the travel agent while both were in the same jail. He said the entrepreneur at the time had given him an identical account of the CIA's recruitment attempt.

The CIA declined to comment on the travel agent case. The five former U.S. national security officials, however, confirmed details of how the visa ploy is used to gather Iranian intelligence.

Left in the cold

When Hosseini, the engineer, next met with the CIA in 2009, he readied for the most momentous meeting yet. He had spent months gathering secret data on vulnerable points in Iran's national power grid. He said he had ridden his motorcycle through the desert gathering photos and GPS coordinates of main electric poles and stations he believed could be targeted by missiles or saboteurs to cause massive blackouts.

But when he arrived in Malaysia, he was met by a sole CIA agent.

"Things have changed," the officer said.

The CIA was no longer interested in the information he collected on electrical grid vulnerabilities, Hosseini said the officer told him.

Hosseini was floored. He had taken such risks to deliver for his handlers. "But now they just weren't interested," he said.

Going forward, he said, the officer wanted him to dig deeper into plans at the Fordow nuclear facility, where Hosseini said his company had recently won a contract.

That plant, located inside a mountain near the holy city of Qom, had remained hidden from United Nations nuclear inspectors until Iran confirmed its existence in 2009. At the time, the administration of U.S.

President Barack Obama used revelations of the site's existence to try to win leverage as it began diplomatic talks aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Hosseini said the CIA requested more granular information on Fordow, which he believed Washington wanted to help it with its negotiations. Hosseini interpreted his handlers' pivot as reflecting the new Obama administration's desire to move towards a diplomatic solution with Iran.

Former CIA officers say shifts in intelligence priorities are common when a new president takes power. Still, they said, the redirecting of informants is almost always done for more mundane, tactical reasons, never fully explained to the spy.

Hosseini said he continued to provide information to the CIA for another year. At one point his CIA handler raised the idea of meeting his family, an offer Hosseini hoped would presage the possibility of eventual resettlement in the United States.

Resettlement, however, is a rare reward. Washington allots the CIA only around 100 visas a year to offer as a carrot to its spies throughout the world, three former intelligence officers said.

"This involves enormous resources and operational planning and will be reserved for the star of the star sources," said Pillar, the former CIA intelligence analyst.

Hosseini spent almost 10 years at Evin prison in Tehran, a lockup known for housing political prisoners and accused spies. Many face torture and execution, according to former detainees and human rights groups.

Almost a decade there took its toll, Hosseini said. Years of confinement and extended torture – beatings, electrical shocks and isolation in rooms lighted around the clock – damaged his ability to communicate, even with family, he said

"When they ask me a question, I feel like I'm back in the interrogation room," he said.

Iran's government did not respond to requests for comment on the treatment of detainees.

Out of prison for three years now, Hosseini, now 47, has lost his affluent lifestyle and many of his friends, whom he fears cooperated with Iranian security forces in his prosecution.

Of the six former spies interviewed by Reuters, four remained in Iran after being released from jail, and two others are living as refugees, one in Turkey, the other in Switzerland. All say they have been unable to obtain assistance from the United States as they struggle to rebuild their lives.

Most haven't been able to find a way to ask.

Hosseini said the CIA did provide him two ways to reach out for help if he got into trouble. One method was to dial a secret U.S.-based number from somewhere outside of Iran, giving a passcode to an operator. The second was to contact a regional security officer at a consulate anywhere in the world and ask for help. Reuters confirmed these are two methods the CIA offers to informants to reach out for assistance.

By the time Hosseini left prison in 2019, he no longer remembered the secret number. And he feared repercussions if Iranian intelligence discovered him walking into a U.S. consulate to reinstate contact following his espionage conviction.

All six former spies interviewed by Reuters said that, given their sacrifices, they had hoped the U.S. government would find a way to contact them and offer help building new lives in America or another country. Years after release, they are still waiting.

	<p>But from the CIA's perspective, there's often enormous risk and little upside in reconnecting with a captured spy in Iran, former U.S. intelligence officials said. Detainees lucky enough to escape execution, they said, could emerge from prison as double agents. Those that aren't would likely be monitored closely by Iranian authorities for any potential missteps.</p> <p>"We have to ask, what is the best way to keep this guy alive, and sometimes the best answer is to leave them alone," said a former senior intelligence officer who was involved in the CIA's response to the compromise of its spies in Iran. "At the end of the day, we have to hope that they and their family are thrilled to be alive."</p> <p>Hosseini feels differently. He now supports his family on less than \$250 a month, one-tenth his old earnings, cobbled together from part-time information technology support work. Some engineering firms initially hired Hosseini, he said, only to fire him days later, upon completion of his background screening.</p> <p>Once fiercely opinionated, he is now careful to censor his views around friends, fearful that he will be reported. Many mornings he wakes up gripped with anxiety at the prospect of rearrest.</p> <p>"I can't imagine any future," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/29 Joining NATO Finland is Russia target
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-nato-moscow-government-and-politics-df9a9005df8eee9a71b3318332a9f0f9
GIST	<p>HELSINKI (AP) — Finland's future NATO membership will make the Nordic country a more interesting target for Russian intelligence and influencing operations, and Moscow may seek to acquire NATO-related intelligence through its neighbor, the Finnish Security and Intelligence Service said on Thursday.</p> <p>In its national security review, the agency known by the abbreviation SUPO said that Russia has turned to the cyber environment and other intelligence sources, including foreigners living in Russia, as it is facing obstacles with its human intelligence operations in the West.</p> <p>"The main intelligence gathering approach traditionally applied by the Russian intelligence services is human intelligence under diplomatic cover," SUPO said. "This has become substantially more difficult since Russia launched its war of aggression in Ukraine, as many Russian diplomats have been expelled from the West."</p> <p>The agency said the Russian security and intelligence services are increasingly targeting foreigners who reside in or visit Russia. Russians working in the West may also be a target of intelligence gathering when visiting their home country, it said.</p> <p>The threat of corporate espionage by Russia is also increasing as sanctions set by the West on Russia necessitate Moscow's launch of high-technology manufacturing to replace imports, the agency said. It added that "this places a particular premium on data security in Finnish businesses".</p> <p>Finland, a nation of 5.5 million, applied for membership in NATO together with Sweden in May. It shares a 1,340-kilometer (830-mile) land border with Russia, the longest of any European Union member.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/29 Finland bans entry Russia tourists
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-travel-finland-pekka-haavisto-f7aa89aae9ae2b0b962538ba0be43f91
GIST	<p>HELSINKI, Finland (AP) — The Finnish government said Thursday it would significantly limit passenger traffic on Finland's border with Russia, banning Russian citizens traveling with tourist visas from entering the Nordic country effective Friday.</p>

	<p>“The decision in principle aims to completely prevent Russian tourism to Finland and the related transit through Finland,” Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto said during a news conference.</p> <p>The government justified its decision by saying that continued arrivals of Russian tourists in Finland is endangering the country’s international relations. It said it had discussed the issue with Ukraine’s leadership, among others, ahead of the decision.</p> <p>Haavisto cited security concerns related to Russia’s war in Ukraine, the “illegal” referendums arranged by Russia and recent leaks in the Nord Stream pipelines as events that led to the decision.</p> <p>Russian citizens can still enter Finland, which shares a 1,340-kilometer (830-mile) land border with Russia, for family reasons, for study or work purposes. Also, Russian political dissidents may seek to enter the country for humanitarian purposes.</p> <p>As of Sept. 1, Finland slashed the number of visas — including for tourism purposes — issued to Russian citizens to one-tenth of the typical number, a move seen as a show of solidarity with Ukraine.</p> <p>Haavisto had earlier said he was particularly worried about a kind of Russian “tourist route” through Helsinki airport which was used by thousands of Russians before Moscow’s Feb. 24 attack on Ukraine. Until now, Russians have been crossing into Finland before flying to other European nations as a way of circumventing flight bans imposed after the invasion.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/29 Physician burnout at distressing levels
SOURCE	https://dnyuz.com/2022/09/29/physician-burnout-has-reached-distressing-levels-new-research-finds/
GIST	<p>Ten years of data from a nationwide survey of physicians confirm another trend that’s worsened through the pandemic: Burnout rates among doctors in the United States, which were already high a decade ago, have risen to alarming levels.</p> <p>Results released this month and published in Mayo Clinic Proceedings, a peer-reviewed journal, show that 63 percent of physicians surveyed reported at least one symptom of burnout at the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, an increase from 44 percent in 2017 and 46 percent in 2011. Only 30 percent felt satisfied with their work-life balance, compared with 43 percent five years earlier.</p> <p>“This is the biggest increase of emotional exhaustion that I’ve ever seen, anywhere in the literature,” said Bryan Sexton, the director of Duke University’s Center for Healthcare Safety and Quality, who was not involved in the survey efforts.</p> <p>The most recent numbers also compare starkly with data from 2020, when the survey was run during the early stages of the pandemic. Then, 38 percent of doctors surveyed reported one or more symptoms of burnout while 46 percent were satisfied with their work-life balance.</p> <p>“It’s just so stark how dramatically the scores have increased over the last 12 months,” said Dr. Tait Shanafelt, an oncologist at Stanford University who has led the research efforts.</p> <p>Burnout among physicians has been linked to higher rates of alcohol abuse and suicidal ideation, as well as increased medical errors and worse patient outcomes. In May, the U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy, issued an advisory.</p> <p>“Covid-19 has been a uniquely traumatic experience for the health work force and for their families,” he said, adding, “if we fail to act, we will place our nation’s health at risk.”</p> <p>Dr. Shanafelt noted that most of the studies on burnout among physicians and health care workers at this stage of the pandemic have been focused on certain specialties and geographic hot spots, not on the profession as a whole. With the new data set, he said, “We have, for the first time, real context.”</p>

While the idea of burnout has become ubiquitous, the condition has a definition in medical literature. The Maslach Burnout Inventory, first published in 1981, measures burnout on three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization from work and sense of personal accomplishment.

When the metric was first proposed, a widely held belief was that burnout could be blamed on the dispositions of individual physicians — “that these are just weaklings,” explained Dr. Colin West, a physician at the Mayo Clinic who helped conceive of the survey efforts. Over time, though, the problem persisted and that belief became outdated.

“This couldn’t just be pawned off as a handful of people who couldn’t handle the career,” Dr. West said. In 2019, the National Academy of Medicine released a [312-page report](#) on physician burnout, carefully laying out the current understanding of the issue and steps that people in the medical profession could take to address it. Dr. Shanafelt, who helped write the report, said that evidence suggested that many doctors’ dissatisfaction with their work could be caused by an incongruence between what they cared about and what they were incentivized to do by the health care system.

“We cared about quality of patients’ experience, building relationships with them, and then there were all these things we got paid for,” Dr. Shanafelt said. A doctor may stop looking forward to patient visits if each one is accompanied by a large amount of paperwork; they may feel as if their time is being wasted by an inefficient process.

“Even something that was once a good thing can become tarnished,” he added.

The researchers noted that the most recent survey’s broad scope has limitations. About 2,500 physicians participated by responding to a mass email, a fraction of the estimated one million practicing physicians in the United States. And the factors that might lead someone to complete a survey on burnout — such as the need for an outlet to express frustration or the lack of time to complete one — could have had complicating effects.

Doctors also exist within an ecosystem of other health workers. Dr. Sexton [published](#) a study of more than 70 hospitals this month that showed burnout is often a local phenomenon. “A lot of a person’s exhaustion score is connected to who they work with,” he said. “There’s a social contagion in burnout. If your colleagues are fried and you’re not, give it six months and you’ll look just like them.”

Doctors were unevenly affected by the early stages of the pandemic. While emergency physicians and family physicians worked around the clock, constantly exposed to Covid-19, many physicians in other specialties were able to reach their patients through telehealth appointments and spend more time with their families. Combined with a possible optimism that the worst of the pandemic was over, the rise of remote work might explain why emotional exhaustion rates actually fell among surveyed physicians in mid-2020 to the lowest point since the survey began in 2011.

But two and a half years into the pandemic, the most recent survey pointed to an overall decline in mental health.

The survey also suggested that some physicians were at higher risk of burnout, including those practicing emergency medicine, family medicine and pediatrics, as well as women physicians in general. Dr. Shanafelt said this might be because of the shortage of mental health services. “They’ve got 10 minutes to take care of their patients. There’s no psychiatrist or therapist to refer them to because our health care system is overwhelmed,” he said.

The increase in burnout is most likely a mix of new problems and exacerbated old ones, Dr. Shanafelt said. For instance, the high number of messages doctors received about patients’ electronic health records was [closely linked](#) to increased burnout before the pandemic. After the pandemic, the number of messages from patients coming into physicians’ In Baskets, a health care closed messaging system, [increased by 157 percent](#).

	<p>And physicians pointed to the politicization of science, labor shortages and the vilification of health care workers as significant issues. In one survey published in 2021, 23 percent of physicians reported being bullied, threatened or harassed by their patients at work in the past year.</p> <p>Dr. Sexton added: “On a hopeful note, we know that there are simple interventions that can have as much a positive effect on well-being as the pandemic had a negative effect. So, yes, things are worse during the pandemic, but they’re not so bad that we don’t know how to fix it.”</p> <p>Dr. West, who has done research on how to combat burnout among health care workers, said that “all the solutions run through a common pathway”: They connect people with their most meaningful activities. “What that means is it’s less important what the specific tactic is,” he said, “and more important to make sure that, whatever the solution is, it’s aligned with our basic, fundamental goals.”</p> <p>But Dr. West emphasized the need for data to know the prevalence of burnout and how to combat it. “This really provides a 30,000-foot view pulse check,” he said of the survey. “So that we’re not just guided by our feelings and our intuition.”</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 FDA: new definition of what's 'healthy'
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/health/other/the-fda-announces-a-new-definition-of-what-e2-80-99s-e2-80-98healthy-e2-80-99/ar-AA12lzde
GIST	<p>The Food and Drug Administration announced new rules Wednesday for nutrition labels that can go on the front of food packages to indicate that they are “healthy.”</p> <p>Under the proposal, manufacturers can label their products “healthy” if they contain a meaningful amount of food from at least one of the food groups or subgroups (such as fruit, vegetable or dairy) recommended by the dietary guidelines. They must also adhere to specific limits for certain nutrients, such as saturated fat, sodium and added sugars. For example, a cereal would need to contain three-quarters of an ounce of whole grains and no more than 1 gram of saturated fat, 230 milligrams of sodium and 2.5 grams of added sugars per serving for a food manufacturer to use the word “healthy” on the label.</p> <p>The labels are aimed at helping consumers more easily navigate nutrition labels and make better choices at the grocery store. The proposed rule would align the definition of the “healthy” claim with current nutrition science, the updated Nutrition Facts label and the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the FDA said.</p> <p>The agency also is developing a symbol that companies can voluntarily use to label food products that meet federal guidelines for the term “healthy.”</p> <p>The announcement came ahead of Wednesday’s White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health. The conference was the first of its kind since 1969, when a summit hosted by the administration of President Richard M. Nixon led to major expansions of food stamps, school lunches and other programs that have been credited with reducing hunger nationally and providing a critical safety net during the pandemic.</p> <p>Once finalized, the FDA’s new system will “quickly and easily communicate nutrition information” through tools such as “star ratings or traffic light schemes to promote equitable access to nutrition information and healthier choices,” the White House said in a statement this week. The system “can also prompt industry to reformulate their products to be healthier,” it said, by adding more vegetables or whole grains or developing new products to meet the updated definition.</p> <p>The stakes are high.</p>

Six in 10 American adults have chronic lifestyle-related diseases, often stemming from obesity and poor diet, [according to](#) the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC says these diseases are the leading cause of death and disability and a leading driver in the nation's \$4.1 trillion of annual health-care costs.

And the obesity epidemic is not moving in the right direction: [Studies show](#) that obesity, especially among children, rose significantly during the pandemic, with the greatest change among children ages 5 to 11, who gained an average of more than five pounds. Before the pandemic, about 36 percent of 5- to 11-year-olds were considered overweight or obese; during the pandemic, that increased to 45.7 percent.

In some Latin American countries, governments have instituted stricter food labeling laws, pushing back against sugary beverages and ultra-processed foods in an effort to escape the obesity epidemic that has overtaken the United States. In Chile, for instance, foods high in added sugar, saturated fats, calories and added sodium must display black stop signs on the front of their packages. Nothing with black stop signs can be sold or promoted in schools or included in child-targeted television ads.

Groups such as the Center for Science in the Public Interest have long petitioned the FDA to adopt mandatory, standardized and evidence-based front-of-package labeling. Front-of-package nutrition labeling, they say, will reach more consumers than the "Nutrition Facts" on the backs of packages, helping them quickly choose more-beneficial foods and spurring companies to reformulate products in a more healthful direction. According to nutrition experts, Americans generally consume too much sodium, added sugars and saturated fat in their packaged foods, so to be able to quickly identify foods that are high or low in those nutrients would be a significant public health benefit.

The Biden administration has endorsed the FDA's efforts to crack down on sodium intake, strengthening the agency's [announcement last year](#) that it would have food companies and restaurants reduce sodium in the foods they make by about 12 percent over the next 2½ years. In a parallel effort, the administration suggests the FDA reduce Americans' sugar consumption by "including potential voluntary targets" for food manufacturers' sugar content.

New labeling language is sure to be controversial among food manufacturers that have sought to capitalize on Americans' interest in more-healthful food.

"The FDA's 'healthy' definition can succeed only if it is clear and consistent for manufacturers and understood by consumers," Roberta Wagner, a spokeswoman for the industry organization Consumer Brands Association, said Tuesday.

But what constitutes "healthy" food is a thorny topic among nutrition experts. Would foods high in what many nutrition scientists call "good fats," such as those that contain almonds or avocados, be deemed "unhealthy," whereas artificially sweetened fruit snacks or reduced-fat sugary yogurts might be considered "healthy"?

The proposal is far from final and likely to be met with some resistance from food manufacturers, which have sought in recent years to capitalize on the increasing desire among consumers to eat healthier.

"In reality, FDA's proposed rule will need to undergo significant review and revision to ensure it does not place the politics of food above science and fact," said Sean McBride, founder of DSM Strategic Communications and former executive at the Grocery Manufacturers Association. "The details are critical because the final rule goes well beyond a simple definition by creating a de facto nutrition profile regulatory scheme that will dictate how food can be made for decades to come."

Peter Lurie, executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, said that front-of-package labeling shows real promise but that it must be mandatory, simple, nutrient-specific and include calories. He said that such labeling does change consumer purchasing behaviors and forces companies to reformulate their products to attain more favorable ratings. He said that unless a healthy definition and

label is very specific, some companies will try to game the system by “health-washing” their less healthy products to appear healthy.

The FDA started [a public process](#) to update the “healthy” nutrient content claim for food labeling in 2016. But critics have said the dietary guidelines have often failed to focus on the right things. During the Trump administration, for instance, the 2020 dietary guidelines committee was forbidden to consider the health effects of consuming red meat, ultra-processed foods and sodium.

Federal nutrition guidance has experienced some significant pendulum swings. For many years, recommendations were based on intuitive, but incorrect, thinking: Eating fat makes us fat. Consuming large quantities of cholesterol gives us high cholesterol.

First defined by the FDA in 1994, “healthy” was initially focused on fat content. In 2015, the agency sent a warning letter to snack bar maker Kind about the company’s “healthy” label. At issue? The bars, mostly nuts, were too high in saturated fat. Nutrition experts and Kind submitted a formal petition to the FDA “to update its regulations around the term healthy when used as a nutrient content claim in food labeling,” to reflect current science.

In 2016, the FDA reversed its position, allowing Kind to use the term “healthy” and announcing that the agency would reconsider the definition of the word.

The new FDA guidance announced this week would automatically allow whole fruits and vegetables to bear the claim of “healthy,” and prepared food products would have to meet criteria for nutrient requirements and percentage limits for added sugars, sodium and saturated fats.

“Seven years after filing our [Citizen Petition](#), Kind is celebrating that the FDA has proposed an updated regulatory definition of ‘healthy,’ ” Kind chief executive Russell Stokes said Wednesday. “A rule that reflects current nutrition science and Dietary Guidelines for Americans is a win for public health — and that’s a win for all of us.”

Recent dietary guidelines put an emphasis on eating a plant-based diet, including vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds. They maintain a hard line about limiting your intake of salt and saturated fat, but they state simply that cholesterol is “not a nutrient of concern,” doing away with the long-standing 300-milligram-per-day limit.

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HEADLINE	09/28 Homeless sue San Francisco for housing
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/san-francisco-sued-homeless-demanding-180922639.html
GIST	<p>(Reuters) - San Francisco's homeless are suing the City by the Bay, demanding that it stop rounding them up like criminals and invest in affordable housing instead.</p> <p>More than 57% of the city's homeless is unsheltered, according to advocacy group Coalition on Homelessness, which filed the lawsuit along with seven homeless individuals. San Francisco has failed to provide enough temporary shelters, the group said on Wednesday when announcing the action.</p> <p>San Francisco has close to 8,000 homeless people, according to the city's website.</p> <p>"The City's decades-long failure to adequately invest in affordable housing and shelter has left many thousands of its residents unhoused, forcing them to use tents and vehicles as shelter," said the lawsuit filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California.</p> <p>The advocacy group accused San Francisco's Mayor London Breed, police and other authorities of acting "to criminalize homelessness through an array of brutal policing practices that violate the constitutional rights of unhoused San Franciscans."</p>

	<p>The city's homeless sweeps are rooted in its history of racism in housing and policing, the group added.</p> <p>"The City has also embarked on a campaign to seize and destroy the property of unhoused people with the express purpose of removing visible signs of homelessness from San Francisco's streets."</p> <p>The San Francisco mayor's office declined to comment on the lawsuit, but said the city had a "service-first approach" to addressing unsheltered homelessness.</p> <p>The mayor's office is focused on expanding temporary and permanent housing to offer safe alternatives to people living on the streets, it said, noting that the city has about 3,600 shelter beds.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 PETA storms UW over research monkeys
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3653305/peta-storms-uw-over-treatment-of-medical-research-monkeys-on-first-day-of-classes/
GIST	<p>UW students were greeted with the sound of monkey screeches and people dressed in monkey suits as they walked between the quad and Red Square on their first day of class.</p> <p>It was all part of a protest by PETA and the Northwest Animal Rights Network against UW's Northwest Center for Primate Research, which conducts experiments on monkeys for medical research.</p> <p>PETA protesters say researchers at the lab infect monkeys with diseases, from malaria to zika. PETA's Lisa Jones-Engel, who used to be a researcher in the UW monkey lab, said she left her former job because she could not stand the animal cruelty she witnessed.</p> <p>"You can do anything you want to animals here at the University of Washington," Jones-Engel said. "You can have a monkey chaired for 12 hours, you can restrict their food and fluid throughout the day, you can impact their heads with percussive instruments."</p> <p>Furthermore, Jones-Engel said the entire work is fruitless because monkeys are very different from humans.</p> <p>"Non-human animals do not replicate the diseases and the pathology that we see in humans accurately," Jones-Engel said. "Experiments on diseased, stressed, caged monkeys are not the pathway to human health."</p> <p>Instead, she wants human tissues and cells used in research.</p> <p>The U.S. Department of Agriculture has cited the university several times in recent years for its practices at the lab. PETA is also suing the university over the lab.</p> <p>UW told KIRO Newsradio in a statement that this research will lead to finding cures for diseases like HIV/AIDS. The university added that it hopes, one day, animals won't be needed in this research.</p> <p>"Whenever possible, we use non-animal models for research such as cell cultures and simulation and we continue to seek out these alternatives," the university said.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Homeless camp fire under I-5 bridge
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3652772/fire-under-the-ship-canal-bridge-causes-traffic-backups-on-i-5/
GIST	<p>Update 7:54 a.m.: The two lanes blocked by the fire have been cleared.</p> <p>Original Story: An encampment fire underneath Seattle's Ship Canal Bridge caused traffic backups along Interstate 5 Wednesday morning.</p>

KIRO Newsradio's Sam Campbell says that fire crews have extinguished all but the embers of the fire under the bridge, but lanes continued to crawl past emergency vehicles throughout the morning. Traffic is expected to return to normal as crews continue to get the fire extinguished.

Seattle Police Department officials say they don't know how the fire started but they knew there was combustible materials inside the homeless camp under the bridge.

Firefighters and police responded after reports of smoke and fire from drivers on the bridge, and firefighters say they saw billowing smoke and heard popping from lithium-ion batteries, making them call in for backup.

"Obviously, we take a look at bridge structure integrity and items such as [exploding batteries.] And we typically don't see damage in that regard from fires like these, but it's still worth taking a look at," James Poling, a communications manager with WSDOT said.

William Hughes says he's lived in the camp for more than a year, and now, he's left with next to nothing.

"Now for me, I have to figure out where dinner tonight is coming from," Hughes said. "All of my food just burnt up."

There's been no word on what caused the fire to start.

"All lanes are back open on the express lane. Safety is obviously paramount," Poling said. "Our crews are examining and if there's anything found we will make sure that public safety is taken into consideration."

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HEADLINE	09/28 What happened to monkeypox?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/09/28/monkeypox-vaccine-symptoms-cases/
GIST	<p>New monkeypox cases are declining in the United States, a trend public health officials and clinicians attribute to vaccination and changes in behavior.</p> <p>Eligible individuals who did not receive the monkeypox vaccine were about 14 times more likely to become infected than those who received a first dose of the two-dose vaccine, according to new early data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — a promising sign CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said provides “a level of cautious optimism that the vaccine is working as intended.”</p> <p>The CDC is expanding eligibility for vaccination against a virus that has infected more than 25,000 people in the United States. Despite the decrease in new cases, severe infections have been showing up in recent weeks among men, the majority of them Latino and Black, according to CDC officials. Most have weak immune systems because they have advanced HIV. In many instances, these patients have had more than 100 lesions.</p> <p>Is the monkeypox outbreak over?</p> <p>The monkeypox outbreak is showing signs of slowing in the United States and around the globe.</p> <p>Daily U.S. infections now average around 200 after peaking around 450 in mid-August. Health officials attribute the decline to vaccines and behavioral change among gay men who have reduced sexual activity, the most common mode of transmission.</p> <p>But they're also bracing for monkeypox to stick around as a background threat with periodic flare-ups.</p> <p>“Goal is eradication. Prediction is that we are going to get really close,” Demetre Daskalakis, the deputy coordinator of the federal monkeypox response, told reporters at an event promoting a D.C. vaccine clinic</p>

last week. “The hump is going to go down and we may have sporadic events that happen if we continue the great efforts of D.C. and other jurisdictions to get folks vaccinated.”

Could the monkeypox outbreak get worse?

Experts warn that cases may rise again as people start to lower their guards — a similar dynamic seen during the covid-19 pandemic after cases declined — or if the protection from vaccines turns out to be temporary.

Monkeypox “moved from being very visible to becoming invisible, but it’s still there,” said Peter Chin-Hong, an infectious diseases specialist at the University of California at San Francisco who has treated monkeypox patients. “Invisible doesn’t mean it’s not present. It’s just not up front and center in people’s consciousness.”

Federal health officials also say monkeypox continues to pose a threat to the United States if the virus continues to circulate globally. Authorities believe the current outbreak in the U.S. started with people returning from countries where the virus had already gained a foothold.

Monkeypox could also become endemic in the United States if it spills over into wild animal populations that periodically transmit the virus to humans, as is the case in parts of western and central Africa.

Key questions about the latest version of monkeypox remain unanswered — including [how effective vaccines are](#) when administered under a [new injection method](#) and in preventing infections when the virus is transmitted during sex.

“This is a nascent outbreak and a nascent epidemic where we are still learning about it,” said Anne Rimoin, an epidemiologist at UCLA who has studied monkeypox in Africa for two decades. “We can’t have the hubris we understand everything about this virus and what we are going to see over an extended period of time just based on data from a short period of time.”

Who is still contracting monkeypox?

Globally, the monkeypox outbreak has been concentrated in men who have sex with men, and health authorities have yet to see widespread transmission in other groups.

But infections are no longer almost exclusively among gay and bisexual men. [CDC data](#) showed the share of new cases in men with recent sexual contact with other men declining throughout the summer. But infections are still heavily in that group, which made up two-thirds of cases with known sexual history and gender in the week ending Aug. 20.

Experts say it’s unsurprising that some children or women could contract the virus, especially if they are in the same household as someone in a high-risk group. But they are also less likely to transmit a virus that spreads through close intimate contact.

The outbreak is also [increasingly affecting Black people](#) as it drags on. They made up nearly half of cases in the week ending Sept. 11, while the share of cases declined among Latinos and remained stable among Whites.

Are kids getting monkeypox?

Some worried monkeypox would spread in classrooms through hugging and other close contact among children after the new school year started.

While there have been isolated cases of students with monkeypox, there is no evidence of widespread outbreaks in K-12 schools.

The CDC reported only 19 cases in children between the ages of 6 and 15 [as of Sept. 21](#). Other countries where students have been back in class longer also have not reported significant transmission in children.

College campuses [present more of a concern](#) because students are more likely to be sexually active and in smaller sexual networks where a virus can more efficiently circulate. But there have not been reports of widespread transmission at the collegiate level either, and federal officials have said the risk is low.

How well does the Jynneos vaccine work?

There has been limited data on how well Jynneos, the primary vaccine being used in the U.S. outbreak, works against monkeypox in real-world conditions. On Wednesday, the CDC released data showing rates of monkeypox cases by vaccination status from July 31 through Sept. 3. Among 32 jurisdictions, unvaccinated individuals had 14 times the risk of monkeypox disease compared with people who had received their first vaccine dose 14 days or more earlier.

The data does not take into account differences in behavior or patients' underlying medical conditions. Officials also don't know how many individuals received the vaccine using the traditional method or the alternative method, known as intradermal vaccination, that allows a single-use vial [to be split into five injections](#) because of the vaccine shortage.

Walensky said the early findings, and similar results from studies in other countries, suggest that even one dose of the monkeypox vaccine offers at least some initial protection against infection. But laboratory studies show that immune protection is highest two weeks after the second dose of vaccine, Walensky said during a White House monkeypox briefing Wednesday. "It may be that second dose that provides durable protection."

Rimoin said it will be critical to get additional data on vaccine performance by how the shots are given. "We will need to understand more about durability of protection over time and how much we can attribute to vaccine-induced protection vs. behavior change," she wrote in an email.

Who is eligible for the monkeypox vaccine?

The CDC has expanded the vaccine to groups of people with the highest potential for exposure to monkeypox. On Wednesday, the agency said these groups can get the shot *before* they are exposed to the disease, something many states and local health departments are already doing. Until now, the agency had recommended vaccination for people after exposure.

Among the people who can now get the vaccine:

- Gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men, transgender or nonbinary people who in the past six months have had a new diagnosis of a reportable sexually transmitted disease, such as acute HIV, chlamydia, gonorrhea or syphilis.
- People who have had sex in the past six months at a commercial sex venue or at a large public event in a geographic area where monkeypox is spreading.
- Commercial sex workers.
- People who anticipate experiencing the above risks.

Some individuals are declining to get vaccinated because of the stigma associated with the visible but temporary mark — often a blister. To counter that stigma, new guidance from CDC is allowing people who don't want to risk a visible mark on their forearm to get the shot on skin by their shoulder or upper back, areas more frequently covered by clothes.

How sick are people getting from monkeypox?

Most people recover from monkeypox, but in recent weeks, public health officials say they are hearing more about severe infections. All of the severe cases have been in men, with a median age of 32, said Agam Rao, a CDC monkeypox expert, during a recent [call with clinicians](#) hosted by the CDC and the Infectious Diseases Society of America. The majority have been Latino or Black.

Most have frail immune systems because of advanced HIV, she said. "These patients have had progressive illness. They've had over a hundred lesions in many cases, new lesions, despite being on" the antiviral treatment TP0xx.

Two otherwise healthy men in their 30s developed encephalomyelitis — inflammation of the brain and spinal cord — suggesting that [neurological complications](#) are a potential outcome of monkeypox infections, according to a recent CDC report. Both were treated with TPoxx and recovered but have difficulty walking.

How many people have died from monkeypox?

Monkeypox has not been as deadly in the latest global outbreak compared with earlier ones in parts of Africa where the case fatality ratio has been 3 to 6 percent.

In the United States, authorities have confirmed one death attributed to monkeypox in a [Californian](#) who was severely immunocompromised and are investigating the cause of death in a [Texan with monkeypox](#) who also had severe underlying health issues and a weakened immune system.

Officials say people who are immunocompromised, including those living with HIV, should be especially vigilant in seeking care because they face a higher risk of severe complications including death.

Worldwide, authorities have recorded [just 12 deaths](#) in countries that have not historically reported monkeypox out of nearly 66,000 cases.

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HEADLINE	09/28 When will Covid pandemic truly be ‘over’?
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/when-will-the-pandemic-truly-be-over/
GIST	<p>IT WAS A political stumble that turned into a policy two-step. In a <i>60 Minutes</i> interview, US President Joe Biden declared the Covid pandemic over. Within 12 hours, public health officials, including in his own administration, weighed in to say “No, it’s not.” And within 12 hours after that, the White House—somewhat—walked his comments back.</p> <p>Chalk it up to exuberance—the updated boosters were just rolling out—or to pandemic fatigue. But look past the immediate messaging failure, and the episode poses an important question: If the pandemic isn’t over yet, how will we know when it is?</p> <p>It’s a question that can be countered with layers of answers. Official pronouncements for instance: The World Health Organization says “We are not there yet, but the end is in sight,” while the Department of Health and Human Services notes that the US remains in a public health emergency that could be redeclared next month. Or metrics, for example: According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cases, hospitalizations, and deaths are all declining—but at the same time, Covid has been ranked the third-leading cause of death in the US. Meanwhile, only a third of US residents who are over 50, and thus considered at higher risk of illness, have taken the full four-shot vaccine protocol. As of last week, only 4.4 million people—1.5 percent of those eligible—had received the newest bivalent booster.</p> <p>Look past that mess of contradictions, and beyond them lies a difficult reality: We might never achieve a benchmark that lets us declare the pandemic is behind us. The best “over” we may be able to hope for is that it settles into an endemic state, present but no longer overwhelming. Worst case: It persists, but we cease to care.</p> <p>“There’s no exact point at which we can say, ‘OK, we’re done,’” says Jennifer Kates, a health policy analyst and senior vice president at the Kaiser Family Foundation. “And that’s hard, because people want certainty. Where we are today is very different than where we were a year and a half ago, when the vaccines were new. But we are still at a place where there is an unacceptably high number of deaths—almost 400 a day, three or four times higher than a really bad flu year.”</p> <p>Humans live by stories, and we especially like stories that end happily; it’s alluring to think of the pandemic as a storm that shakes your house but then blows through and reveals blue sky. But the more accurate narrative may be a storm that cracks a seawall holding back the ocean—and ever after, your tap water tastes the tiniest bit like salt.</p>

“There’s no going back to 2019,” says Abraar Karan, a physician and infectious-disease researcher at Stanford University who studies the role of air filtration in reducing infection. “The dead aren’t coming back. The long-term consequences won’t be fully appreciated until we have more time to analyze them. And the variants aren’t going away.”

When the pandemic began, we could imagine that the restoration of specific things we’d put on hold would signal life was returning to normal. Schools [would reopen](#); masks would [come off](#); offices would [fill back up](#), and restaurants would [buzz with diners](#). Thirty months on, we got all those things back—social mixing, return to office, bare faces—without vanquishing the virus. If their return was not the signal, it’s difficult to imagine what could be.

“There won’t be a single moment,” says Caitlin Rivers, an assistant professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and part of the founding leadership at the CDC’s new epidemic forecasting center. “We will recognize the transition only in retrospect.” But among possible milestones—interrupting transmission, suppressing hospitalizations and deaths, relaxing self-sequestering—she points out that we’ve only achieved the third one. “The last dimension that I think about in moving from emergency to routine is when people live their lives in the way that they wish to,” she says. “And I think on that point, we may be close to there.”

That makes moving on from the pandemic a sociopolitical decision rather than an epidemiological one. While it’s not clear whether SARS-CoV-2 can settle into a steady state alongside humanity, we can be pretty confident it hasn’t done that yet. On the same weekend that Biden was declaring the pandemic over, Swedish researchers announced in a preprint (not yet peer-reviewed) that [they had identified](#) yet another viral variant, dubbed BA.2.75.2. Ben Murrell, the preprint’s senior author, [said on Twitter](#) that it “exhibits more extreme antibody escape than any variant we’ve seen so far,” meaning that existing vaccines—possibly including the brand-new Omicron bivalents—might not successfully suppress it.

It’s unnerving to recognize that we might be done with Covid, but Covid might not be done with us. It evokes the *Groundhog Day* feeling of making yet another exhausting circuit through a series of identical events. Except, of course, the moral of *Groundhog Day* is that sincere intention can change the future. There are lessons within the pandemic that we could leverage. We just haven’t taken advantage of most of them.

“In 2020, as awful as it was, I thought: This is finally the time that we’re going to end the cycle of boom and bust—because this event is so profound that we are not going to want to come out of it and just head right back into another one,” says Jennifer Nuzzo, an epidemiologist and director of the Pandemic Center at Brown University School of Public Health.

But in fact, though the US spent [trillions on Covid](#)—in stimulus funds, business rescues, health care subsidies, and vaccine research—things that could make a difference to the next pandemic have yet to be created. Those include funding state and local health departments so they can build back permanent workforces, and reconsidering the health care cost-cutting that left understaffed hospitals so vulnerable to Covid overcrowding. It also includes fixing the collection of disease data in the US. The pipeline is so leaky thanks to incompatible forms and platforms that a coalition of public health organizations estimate it would take [almost \\$8 billion](#) to repair. One recent example of the system’s ineffectiveness: In many states, men who believed themselves at risk for monkeypox, but who also thought they might have been protected by childhood smallpox vaccinations, discovered their [paper vaccination records](#) had never been added to digital systems.

Another way to ascertain when the pandemic is over is to ask whether we’re ready for the next one. About that: We’re not. “That is not one of my indicators, because I don’t think we’re ready for the next pandemic,” Kates says. “And I don’t think we’ll be ready for a long time.”

Which might sound defeatist. But another way to think about getting to “over” is to imagine what actions it would take to suppress Covid as much as possible, and then make them milestones that lead us to the

	pandemic's end. "To me, it will be 'over' when there's little left that we can do," Karan says. "But there are very doable things we can do right now, between closing the booster gap for severe disease and death, to air filtration to reduce super-spreading. And they're not going to get done if the political will is not behind it."
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HEADLINE	09/28 Russia shrugs off pipeline 'sabotage'
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2022-09-28/russia-shrugs-off-accusations-of-nord-stream-sabotage-as-west-fears-ukraine-war-expansion
GIST	<p>Russia shrugged off Western accusations of its complicity in mysterious explosions at the Nord Stream pipelines in Europe this week by calling for an urgent U.N. Security Council meeting to address what it called an act of "sabotage."</p> <p>"Russia has requested an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council in connection with sabotage against two lines of the Nord Stream. We expect it to be held tomorrow," Dmitry Polyanskiy, one of Russia's top representatives at the U.N., wrote on his Telegram channel, according to a translation.</p> <p>Shortly after issuing the statement early Wednesday, the French delegation to the U.N. confirmed to him that a meeting would indeed take place on Friday – a tacit acknowledgement of the panic that the explosions and subsequent leaks have caused.</p> <p>Russian officials appeared eager to capitalize on the fears stemming from the explosions, which have already had an effect on leading European economies. Their actions come at a time the U.S. and its partners fear Moscow is opening up the front lines of its war on Ukraine to outside the former Soviet state as its own campaign suffers from disastrous and embarrassing setbacks.</p> <p>Though Western officials have so far withheld blaming Russia directly, some have hinted at complicity from Moscow, following months of concerns about Putin's willingness to use the pipelines as an alternative form of warfare against Ukraine's benefactors as Europe faces an oncoming cold winter.</p> <p>"These apparent explosions near Nord Stream just highlights again that we have moved from a situation of relative stability in the war in Ukraine back into a period of high escalation risks," Emma Ashford, a senior fellow with the Stimson Center think tank, tweeted.</p> <p>Europe – and by extension, the world – was already facing an energy crisis as a result of Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine seven months ago. Economic powers there had since sought new avenues for energy, perhaps imports from the U.S., as a way to wean off the decades-long process of integrating its markets with Russia's.</p> <p>The mysterious gas leaks this week have already caused widespread panic, with Danish officials earlier on Wednesday acknowledging that the eruptions from the pipelines – known as Nord Stream I and Nord Stream II – could alone release the equivalent of one-third of its annual greenhouse emissions. Denmark's prime minister joined several other European leaders late Tuesday to condemn the crisis as the result of "deliberate actions."</p> <p>Moscow has suggested U.S. or Ukrainian officials are responsible as a part of its broader narrative that the Biden administration in its support for Kyiv seeks only to bolster its own ability to sell to European countries exports of liquid natural gas, known as LNG.</p> <p>Secretary of State Antony Blinken when asked about the apparent sabotage late Tuesday declined to blame Russia directly, citing the ongoing investigation, but emphasized the administration's efforts to ease Europe's transition away from reliance on Russian fuel.</p> <p>"It's worth noting that our own oil production is up by more than 500,000 barrels per day this year," Blinken told reporters at a press conference alongside his visiting Indian counterpart. "Our LNG</p>

	<p>exports are up more than 20 percent since last year. In fact, we became the largest LNG supplier to the European Union and the U.K. this year, and we've become the largest overall LNG exporter this year. And of course, as you know, we've been tapping into the Strategic Petroleum Reserve at unprecedented levels. Others are doing the same. This is having an impact both on supply and on price."</p> <p>Russia has previously weaponized its pipelines to exert pressure on would-be partners of Ukraine to reconsider new forms of military support.</p> <p>The German government has faced criticism for years for its endorsement of the Nord Stream II pipeline from Russia through the Baltics and to Germany. It strategically bypasses Ukraine, which prior to Russia's initial invasion in 2014 had served as a key hub for energy flows from the east into Europe.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Iran nuclear deal talks reach dead end?
SOURCE	https://freebeacon.com/national-security/iran-nuclear-deal-talks-at-dead-end-biden-admin-tells-congress-in-classified-briefing/
GIST	<p>The Biden administration's negotiations with Iran over a revamped version of the 2015 nuclear deal have hit a dead end, jeopardizing the likelihood of a new agreement, senior U.S. officials informed Congress during a classified briefing.</p> <p>A deal seemed within reach earlier this month as U.S. officials presented Iran with a proposal that would significantly unwind economic sanctions and provide the regime with somewhere near one trillion dollars over the lifetime of the agreement. Iran, however, balked and negotiations are at a standstill, according to Rep. Darrell Issa (R., Calif.), who participated in the closed-door briefing held two weeks ago for members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.</p> <p>"Two weeks ago, they thought they had a deal, and now they know they don't have a deal, and are stymied about how they get to a deal because they've negotiated all there was to negotiate, and, at the end of the day, Iran doesn't want the deal that was negotiated," Issa told the <i>Washington Free Beacon</i>. Those details were also relayed by other congressional sources familiar with the briefing.</p> <p>Biden administration officials were not optimistic about the prospects for a new deal. Officials told lawmakers, "We've negotiated for a year and a half through our good friend and honest broker Russia and we got the same thing that we should have expected, which is, they want a better deal than they had before, and if you don't give them a better deal, then they don't want a deal," according to Issa. "They're basically on the eve of getting a nuclear weapon and don't want to be talked out of it."</p> <p>Issa's comments jibe with the rhetoric coming from Iranian officials, who say the proposed deal does not go far enough in providing Tehran with sanctions relief and assurances that funds will keep flowing to the regime. Iran also wanted sanctions on several of its designated terrorist entities lifted, particularly the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which was designated as a terrorist organization by the Trump administration for its attacks on U.S. positions and allies in the region.</p> <p>Iranian foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on Wednesday said that talks were "at a stage where there are just a couple of issues remaining on the table, but which are very significant and important."</p> <p>"The issue of guarantees is very important to us," Amir-Abdollahian said. "The American side has taken some steps towards giving us guarantees. We just need these guarantees to become a little bit more complete."</p> <p>Issa said the outstanding issues center around sanctions that target Iran's terrorism enterprise.</p> <p>"They want concessions as to their basic sanctions for being a terrorist state, and it's a bridge that neither Republicans nor Democrats will allow them to cross," said Issa.</p>

The Obama administration, during its talks in 2015, "got away with saying they weren't giving up anything relative to the sanctions that occurred related to [Iran's] terrorist activities," Issa said.

At this point, however, "it's very clear that when you look on sanctions on the IRGC that came out of their Middle Eastern terror activities, that's a line [the Iranians] clearly want and that I believe no administration can give it to them."

Some Democrats have become increasingly vocal about their concerns related to a new deal.

Rep. Josh Gottheimer (D., N.J.) led a [bipartisan letter](#) with 49 other lawmakers informing the Biden administration that they remain "deeply concerned about multiple provisions that reportedly may be contained in the final language of any agreement with the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism."

The lawmakers said it would be impossible for Congress to accept any new deal that "could significantly dilute the effectiveness of terrorism-related sanctions on the IRGC, Iran's paramilitary terror arm, and provides the organization with a pathway for sanctions evasion."

Issa, for his part, said he does not expect further negotiations to be productive, given Iran's excessive demands.

Both sides "clearly negotiated to a completion, not some sort of standstill," Issa said.

"They ran out of new things to talk about and finally got to a point where it's time to accept it," he said. "I believe [Iran] never negotiated in good faith, which means there's really no reason to go back to them until there's a huge change that shows why negotiations would be different."

A senior congressional source familiar with the briefing told the *Free Beacon* that negotiations should be shut down as a result of Iran's crackdown on anti-regime protests, which are sweeping the country.

"In diplomacy as in business, the side that wants a deal will find their negotiating position only gets weaker and their number of concessions just keep piling up," the source said. "I can't think of a worse time to negotiate with the regime than when it's mowing down its people in the streets."

A State Department spokesman would not comment on the contents of the briefing when asked by the *Free Beacon*.

State Department spokesman Ned Price confirmed earlier this week that negotiations with Iran "are not in a healthy place right now" but that the United States is engaging diplomatically, even as protests continue across the country.

"We've made clear that while we have been sincere and steadfast in our efforts to see to it that Iran is once again permanently and verifiably barred from a nuclear weapon, we haven't seen the Iranians make the decision, the Iranian government make the decision that it would need to make if it were to commit to a mutual return to compliance with the" nuclear deal, Price said.

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HEADLINE	09/29 US partnership deal Pacific island leaders
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/29/us-pledges-to-boost-aid-and-diplomacy-in-pacific-as-historic-summit-begins
GIST	The United States said at a summit with Pacific island leaders that it had agreed on a partnership for the future with them and held out the prospect of "big dollar" help to a region where it hopes to stem China's expanding influence.

The Washington Post quoted US officials as saying the Biden administration would announce it would invest more than \$860m in expanded programs to aid the islands at the two-day summit, on top of more than \$1.5bn provided in the past decade.

The White House had no immediate comment on the funding figure, but a US official said the newspaper's reporting that all the visiting leaders had endorsed an 11-point statement of vision committing to joint endeavours was accurate.

They included Solomon Islands prime minister Manasseh Sogavare, whose government had earlier indicated it would not sign the declaration, raising further concerns about his ties to China. Sogavare's spokesman had no immediate comment.

It is the first time the United States has been host to so many leaders of a region it has considered its maritime backyard since the second world war, but into which China has been making steady advances. Some of the nations have complained about being caught in the middle of the superpowers' battle for influence.

Secretary of state, Antony Blinken, welcomed the leaders to the summit and promised: "You can count on the United States partnering with you."

The lead-up to the meeting had been clouded by the leak of documents showing that Solomon Islands had rejected a draft US agreement with the region and that Micronesian leaders had raised serious concerns about the level of financial assistance on offer.

A leaked note seen by the Guardian, written by the embassy of Solomon Islands in New York, announced that the country, which signed a controversial security deal with China in April, would not be endorsing a regional diplomatic agreement being proposed by the US.

Blinken on Wednesday made a veiled reference to China's growing assertiveness around the region and across Asia, saying that the US would work with the islands on "preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific where every nation – no matter how big, no matter how small – has the right to choose its own path."

Following up on an initiative last week on the sidelines of the UN general assembly, Blinken promised \$4.8m to strengthen "blue economies" – cleaner oceans with more sustainable fishing.

He also promised an assertive stance on climate change by the US, which under Biden has approved domestic action on green energy after years of gridlock and skepticism by much of the rival Republican party.

Biden will meet the leaders on Thursday, a personal touch that US officials hope will help reestablish Washington's preeminence after long taking for granted a region the US has dominated for decades.

Administration officials did not deny that Pacific Island nations voiced concerns that the pivot could be temporary. But officials highlighted the breadth and bipartisan support for the effort.

As part of a new strategy, the US would appoint its first envoy to focus on the Pacific Islands and was adding three more diplomatic missions in the region, bringing the total from six to nine, officials said.

The US would also resume a USAID office in Fiji and expand contacts through the Coast Guard, defence department and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The US as well as Australia and New Zealand, which are participating in the summit as observers, had a wake-up call when Solomon Islands signed its secretive security pact with China.

	<p>After intensive US and Australian appeals, the broader region rejected an overarching pact with China. But western officials fear that Beijing will use Solomon Islands as a base to expand militarily into the Pacific or to pressure Taiwan, a self-governing democracy claimed by Beijing.</p> <p>Sogavare, in a speech at the United Nations last week, vowed that his tiny country “will not be coerced into choosing sides”.</p> <p>Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Weng Wenbin, asked about Biden’s summit, said that Pacific Island nations were sovereign and had the right to build relations with any country.</p> <p>“Growing relations with the Pacific Island countries is not about seeking a sphere of influence and does not target any third party,” he told reporters.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 EU seeks to cap price on Russia oil
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/28/brussels-promises-to-cap-price-russia-oil-putin-escalation-european-commission-sanctions-ukraine-war
GIST	<p>The EU executive has promised to cap the price of Russian oil and impose further curbs on hi-tech trade, as part of the latest round of sanctions to “make the Kremlin pay” for the escalation of the war against Ukraine.</p> <p>The president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, said Russia had ramped up the invasion to “a new level”, listing the sham referendums in Russian-occupied territory, the partial mobilisation order and Vladimir Putin’s threat to use nuclear weapons. “We are determined to make the Kremlin pay for this further escalation,” she said.</p> <p>She promised the EU would introduce a price cap on Russian oil to “help reduce Russian revenues and keep the global market stable”. The European Commission also wants to impose further restrictions on hi-tech goods the EU can sell to Russia such as certain chemicals and aviation components to further weaken the Kremlin’s ability to wage war.</p> <p>Von der Leyen said anyone who helped Russia evade sanctions faced being added to the EU’s list of restrictive measures. “This will have a major deterring effect,” she said.</p> <p>Shortly before she spoke, Oleg Ustenko, an economic adviser to Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, urged the EU to introduce a price cap on Russian oil “as soon as possible”. Ustenko said Russia was earning hundreds of millions a day from selling oil, which was being channelled to fund the war against Ukraine.</p> <p>“Of course the main goal is to cut off Putin’s regime from all possible sources of financing. No doubt that the main source of financing for them right now is everything related to fossil fuels,” he added.</p> <p>EU nations have spent €98.5bn (£88bn) on Russian oil, gas and coal since the invasion was launched on 24 February, of which more the €50bn has been on oil, according to the Beyond Coal tracker.</p> <p>In Ukraine’s view the EU’s package of sanctions should “be already done”, Ustenko told reporters, urging the European Commission to table the proposals as soon as possible.</p> <p>The ambassadors of the EU’s 27 member states were briefed by Commission officials on the plans on Wednesday afternoon. While the plans predate the fake referendums organised by Russia in occupied Ukraine, the EU has responded by adding more people to its sanctions list. Officials who work for proxy Russian authorities in Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, as well as those who have facilitated the sham polls, will face EU visa bans and asset freezes.</p>

The EU proposal for an oil price cap was widely expected after a pledge by the G7 earlier this month. Under plans agreed by the US, Canada, Japan, the UK, France, Germany and Italy, firms shipping and insuring Russian oil will only be able to operate if they adhere to a price below a yet-to-be-determined level.

The plan takes advantage of the fact that most Russian oil is shipped and insured by companies operating in the EU and the UK. The price cap, pushed by the US Treasury secretary, Janet Yellen, and Italy's outgoing prime minister, Mario Draghi, is seen as a necessary follow-up to the EU's decision to ban 90% of Russian oil imports at the end of the year.

The EU ban on most Russian crude oil purchases comes into force on 5 December, with an embargo on refined products such as diesel following on 5 February. The US was concerned that without action to control oil prices, costs for consumers and businesses would soar afterwards.

Analysts have said the oil-price plan is technically complex and uncertain to work, as China, India and Turkey, the three largest importers of Russian oil outside the EU, do not support the idea.

Ustenko, however, insisted "pragmatic" countries such as India and China would come on board, saying: "Who on the market is willing to pay an extra premium for Putin's oil? Even if they are not signing the agreement they are going to follow up the rules."

The European Commission also has to convince EU member states with large shipping industries, such as Greece, Cyprus and Malta. But a more difficult hurdle for reaching unanimity is likely to be Hungary, a large consumer of Russian energy that has blamed western sanctions for causing a "global economic war".

"This [sanctions] weapon backfired and Europeans are paying a sanctions surcharge for oil, gas and electricity," the Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orbán, told his parliament on Monday. The Orbán government also plans to organise a referendum on public support for sanctions, a well-established tool it uses to raise the temperature in its disputes with the EU.

Ustenko said the European Commission should consider withholding EU funds from Hungary if the country failed to support sanctions. The legal options for such a step are doubtful, although Brussels has threatened to suspend €7.5bn of EU funds for Budapest over separate concerns about corruption.

Another element of the sanctions plan includes a ban on EU nationals sitting on the boards of Russian companies, a move that would affect the former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who has been excoriated for refusing to give up his friendship with Putin. Schröder stood down from Russian oil major Rosneft in May, but retains a role at pipeline company Nord Stream.

"Offering well-remunerated posts on the governing boards of Russian state-owned enterprises ... has long been an important element of the Russian government's efforts to gain undue political influence on EU member states," states the original proposal drafted by Germany's government. "We should put an end to these attempts of strategic corruption."

Diplomats said the proposals were not target explicitly at Schröder. After Putin launched the invasion off Ukraine, the former French prime minister and presidential candidate François Fillon stood down from positions on the boards of two Russian companies, while the former Austrian chancellor Christian Kern quit the board of Russia's state-owned railways.

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HEADLINE	09/29 Day 218 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/29/russia-ukraine-war-latest-what-we-know-on-day-218-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, has proposed a fresh round of proposed sanctions on Russia designed "to make the Kremlin pay" for escalating the conflict

in Ukraine. The proposed [eighth package of “biting” sanctions](#) includes a cap on the price of Russian oil and further curbs on hi-tech trade.

- **Politicians across Europe have warned that the suspected sabotaging of the two Nord Stream pipelines could herald a new stage of hybrid warfare** targeting vulnerable energy infrastructure in order to undermine support of Ukraine. Norway’s prime minister, Jonas Gahr Støre, said [his country would step up its military presence](#) at Norwegian installations after the country became Europe’s largest supplier of natural gas.
- **A report drawn up by an international working group on sanctions concluded Russia should now be declared a “state sponsor of terrorism”** and had reached the legal definition of a terrorist state under US and Canadian law. The head of the Office of the Ukrainian Presidency, Andriy Yermak, called for sweeping American and European sanctions in light of the report, after [Ukraine](#) accused Russia of sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines under the Baltic Sea.
- **Moscow is poised to formally annex Russian-occupied regions after so-called referendums** that have been denounced by the west. The Russian-installed leaders of the [Luhansk, Kherson](#) and [Zaporizhzhia regions](#) in Ukraine have formally asked President Vladimir Putin to annex the occupied territories into Russia. Russia’s foreign ministry said [action would be taken soon to meet](#) the “aspirations” of four occupied Ukrainian regions to become part of Russia. Once annexed, [Russia’s leadership has said it will consider attacks](#) on the Russian-controlled areas as a direct attack on Russia.
- **President Volodymyr Zelenskiy says Ukraine will “act to protect our people”** in Russian-occupied regions after the what he described as “an imitation of referendums”. Ukraine’s foreign ministry said Kyiv and its allies “condemn such actions of Russia and [consider them null and worthless](#)”.
- **Britain’s prime minister, Liz Truss, told Zelenskiy in a phone call that the UK would never recognise Russian attempts to annex parts of Ukraine**, Downing Street said. The EU’s foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, also denounced the “illegal referenda and their falsified outcome” in Ukraine.
- **Israel has strengthened its hitherto cautious stance on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine**, saying it will “not accept the results of the referendum in the eastern districts” of the occupied country. [Tuesday night’s statement](#) from the Israeli foreign ministry, which also said it “recognises the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine”, has been received as an unprecedented show of support for Ukraine, and a rare Israeli rebuke to Moscow.
- **Gas prices have risen on fears that Russia could halt supplies to Europe through Ukraine**, adding to turmoil caused by damage to the Nord Stream pipelines. The statement came after the discovery of [leaks on the two Nord Stream gas pipelines](#) near the Danish island of Bornholm in a suspected act of sabotage.
- **The Kremlin dismissed claims that Russia was behind the attack on the Nord Stream gas pipelines**, describing them as “quite predictable and also predictably stupid”. In a call with reporters, the Kremlin spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, [said the incident needed to be investigated](#) and that the timings for the repair of the damaged pipelines were not clear.
- **Authorities in the Russian region of North Ossetia, which borders Georgia, are reportedly putting in place travel restrictions to prevent people fleeing to Georgia to avoid conscription**. The [report by the Moscow Times](#) cites the head of the region, Sergey Menyaylo, as saying that more than 20,000 people had entered Georgia through the section of the border in just the past two days.
- **The US embassy in Moscow has issued a security alert and urged American citizens to leave Russia immediately**. In a statement on its website, it [warned that dual Russian-US nationals may be called up](#) as part of the Russian government’s mobilisation. US citizens should not travel to Russia and that those residing or travelling in the country should depart Russia immediately while limited commercial travel options remain, it said.
- **The governments of Romania, Bulgaria and Poland are urging any citizens that remain in the Russian Federation to leave urgently**. That [may be in anticipation](#) of border crossings becoming much more difficult as routes out close and more people flee forced mobilisation in Russia.
- **Russian authorities say they are establishing checkpoints at some of the country’s borders to forcibly mobilise Russian men** seeking to avoid mobilisation by fleeing the country. Social

	<p>media footage shows military vehicles moving toward the border, reportedly to establish the mobilisation checkpoint.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia is mounting a more substantive defence than previously as Ukraine attempts to press forward “on at least two axes east”, according to the UK’s Ministry of Defence. Heavy fighting continued in the Kherson region, where the Russian force on the right bank of the Dnipro remained vulnerable, it said in its latest intelligence update. • Ukrainian authorities say they have identified five Russian soldiers who allegedly shot at civilian cars in the Kyiv region during the first days of the war. The Russian soldiers are charged with killing five people, and injuring a further six, who were trying to flee Hostomel on 25 February, a day after Russia invaded.
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HEADLINE	09/28 Iran launches airstrikes in northern Iraq
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/28/iran-launches-airstrike-against-kurdish-group-northern-iraq-mahsa-amini-protests
GIST	<p>Iran has launched a deadly cross-border airstrike into northern Iraq to punish Kurds for their role in supporting demonstrations over the death of a 22-year-old Kurdish woman in Iranian police custody that are still rattling the Tehran regime.</p> <p>As many as 13 people were killed and 58 injured in the Iranian drone strikes on military bases in northern Iraq that belong to the exiled Kurdish Democratic party of Iran.</p> <p>The KDPI said in a statement: “The forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran attacked the bases and headquarters of the Kurdistan Democratic party of Iran with missiles and drones.”</p> <p>Iran said it was attacking terrorist bases, while the US described the strikes as brazen.</p> <p>The attack occurred as the Iranian president, Ebrahim Raisi, addressed the nation to express his regret over the death of Mahsa Amini a fortnight ago, but also to accuse the protesters of being agents of foreign powers.</p> <p>“The enemy has targeted national unity and wants to pit people against each other,” the ultraconservative president said.</p> <p>Raisi said Iran would not tolerate “chaos and riots” but also said that there could be “dialogue” on “different methods of applying the law” – a possible reference to Iran’s morality police’s strict enforcement of compulsory hijab.</p> <p>It was the first time Raisi has directly addressed the street protests on national TV but his mention of dialogue is unlikely to assuage an assertive young generation of Iranians who have lost faith in the elderly clerical establishment – especially as it was the hardline president who ordered a stricter application of the hijab laws earlier this summer.</p> <p>Activists in Iran, speaking to the Guardian on condition of anonymity, said: “Our confidence is growing. We are not backing down despite the arrests. It is very beautiful. There is a belief that something is going to change this time.”</p> <p>Lawyers acting for Amini’s family have, in defiance of regime pressure, filed a formal complaint against those responsible for her arrest. They have demanded a detailed independent investigation into her death, including the manner of arrest and transfer to hospital, as well as photographs and videos of the arrest, and any brain scans.</p> <p>Amini, now a symbol of resistance to the regime, died in police custody after she was picked up by the morality police in Tehran for not wearing a hijab properly.</p>

The KPDI urged its supporters inside Iran to return to the streets, with its London spokesperson saying: “Support for these demonstrations is building. This started about one Kurdish woman and the wearing of the hijab, but it is now something wider in over 100 cities. The chant in the streets is: ‘Death to the regime. Death to the dictator.’”

Reports on the number of deaths amid the protests differ; the Oslo-based human rights group Iran Human Rights said the figure was at least 76, while Iran’s semi-official Fars news agency has put the toll at “around 60”, including several members of the Iranian security forces.

The regime will be desperate to ensure the protests do not extend to more working-class districts, and is likely to portray the protesters as anti-patriotic liberals at odds with the values of the regime.

Iran’s police said on Wednesday they would confront protests “with all their might”. However, the country’s minister for women’s affairs, Ensieh Khazali, said she had visited arrested women in jail and was seeking the release of those not guilty of major offences.

The UN said its secretary general, António Guterres, had called on Raisi not to use “disproportionate force” against protesters.

“We are increasingly concerned about reports of rising fatalities, including women and children, related to the protests,” the UN chief’s spokesperson, Stéphane Dujarric, said.

Iran has shut down the internet to prevent protesters using social media to inform the outside world of the scale of the repression. Up to 20 reporters have been arrested, and newspapers are increasingly toeing the government line that the protests are being manipulated by Saudi Arabian or western media. Some papers are staging debates on whether the compulsory hijab is required by sharia law.

The regime has continued to claim the west’s response followed what it regarded as a successful performance by Raisi at the UN general assembly in New York. But the regime is being battered by the persistence of the demonstrations and the willingness of prominent Iranians, including musicians, actors, sports stars and academics, to demand the voice of young Iranians be respected.

Fatemeh Motamed-Arya, an award-winning actor, appeared without hijab to speak at the funeral ceremony of fellow actor Amin Tariokh. The Iranian football coach and former player Ali Karimi has also backed the demonstrations, as has the composer Hossein Alizadeh.

In Britain, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, the British Iranian dual-national who spent five years in an Iranian jail, cut her hair for BBC Persian cameras to show solidarity with the protests in Iran.

Companies said the continued shutdown of the internet was damaging business.

On Tuesday, authorities in Iran arrested the daughter of the former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani for “inciting rioters”, the Tasnim news agency reported. They have also been threatening celebrities and football stars who have supported the protesters.

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HEADLINE	09/29 Russia missiles strike central Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-strikes-central-ukraine-as-kyivs-forces-advance-in-the-east-11664444545?mod=hp_lead_pos8
GIST	<p>KHARKIV, Ukraine—Russia struck the central Ukrainian city of Dnipro with cruise missiles, wrecking a residential neighborhood and killing at least three civilians, officials said, as Ukrainian forces pressed their offensive in the eastern part of the country.</p> <p>Thursday’s strikes on Dnipro, a major industrial hub, were the latest in a series of Russian attacks that seek to sap Ukraine’s ability to function by targeting civilian infrastructure. On Tuesday, Russian missiles hit</p>

the power station in Kharkiv for the second time this month, causing daylong blackouts in many parts of Ukraine's second-largest city.

The early-morning Russian attack on Dnipro damaged 60 private houses and several high-rises, a city market, a bus station and power lines, said regional administration head Valentyn Reznichenko. An injured 12-year-old girl was pulled from one of the destroyed buildings. "Rescue workers continue searching in the rubble, and more children may be there," he said in a social-media post. "Bloody Russian world. Payback will come."

Elsewhere in the region, Russia fired Uragan cluster munitions at the town of Zelenodolsk, injuring 14 employees of an infrastructure facility, Mr. Reznichenko said. The town houses a large power station.

In eastern Ukraine's Kharkiv and Donetsk regions, Ukraine's armed forces continued to gain new ground even as Russia began to pour some of the first batches of [newly mobilized troops](#) to the front line. In the Kharkiv region, most of which was liberated in a lightning offensive two weeks ago, Ukrainian forces expanded their foothold east of the Oskil River, along which Russia had hoped to stabilize the front line. After securing remaining parts of [the city of Kupyansk](#) east of the river, Ukrainian forces took the town of Kovsharivka, mopping up remaining urban pockets still under Russian control, military officials said.

In nearby northern parts of the Donetsk region, Ukrainian forces tightened their noose around the strategic town of Lyman. Only one supply road to thousands of Russian troops defending Lyman remains, and it is already under Ukrainian fire control, Ukrainian and Russian military officers say.

The Ukrainian pushes east of Kupyansk and around Lyman both threaten Russian control over the northern part of Luhansk region, one of the four that Moscow is seeking to [annex through sham referendums](#) conducted this week. None of the four regions is controlled by Russian troops in its entirety, and in one—Zaporizhzhia—the regional capital and the majority of the population have remained under Kyiv's authority throughout the war.

The Russian-appointed leaders of these four occupied territories have already arrived in Moscow with formal requests to join the Russian Federation, something that Russia's parliament could rubber-stamp as soon as next week. No country has indicated so far that it would recognize Moscow's land grab, with China's Foreign Ministry responding to the referendums by saying that it respects "the sovereign and territorial integrity of all countries."

Russia is mobilizing some 300,000 men to shore up its military forces and thwart the Ukrainian offensive that has retaken some 3,500 square miles of Russian-occupied territory, mostly in the Kharkiv region, this month. That amounted to roughly one-tenth of Ukrainian land under Russian control.

There are indications that some of these newly mobilized troops are being sent to the front lines without any training. A senior Ukrainian military officer on the Kharkiv front said that Ukrainian forces have already captured some of the newly mobilized soldiers. A company of these men that arrived near Kupyansk in recent days set up its position without taking any precautions against Ukrainian observation drones, and was immediately destroyed by Ukrainian artillery fire, he said. Russia's military has suffered tens of thousands of casualties in Ukraine, according to Western estimates.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has made repeated appeals to mobilized Russian soldiers in recent days. "If you want to live—run away. If you want to live—surrender. If you want to live—fight for your own freedom on your own streets," he said Wednesday night, speaking in Russian.

Hundreds of thousands of Russian men are estimated to have [fled the country](#) to avoid potentially deadly duty in Ukraine. Over the past seven days, that number likely exceeded the size of the entire Russian military force that Moscow fielded to invade Ukraine in February, Britain's Defense Ministry said in Thursday's update.

	<p>“The better off and well educated are overrepresented among those attempting to leave Russia,” it said, forecasting a significant impact on the Russian economy.</p> <p>The speaker of the Russian parliament, Vyacheslav Volodin, Thursday called for a ban on foreign travel for all Russian men who could be potentially drafted for service.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/29 Police bonuses, lower standards to hire
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/police-departments-are-dangling-bonuses-to-attract-new-cops-11664443802?mod=hp_lead_pos9
GIST	<p>The police chief in Redding, Calif., last year increased signing bonuses to \$7,500 from \$5,000 to attract new recruits.</p> <p>The plan didn’t work, so this year Chief Bill Schueller raised the offer to \$40,000, more than half of an entire year’s starting salary at the agency.</p> <p>The outsize bonus was necessary, he said, to recruit experienced officers in a line of work that has lost its popularity. After nationwide protests over the 2020 murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer, Mr. Schueller said, “the negative attention brought to law enforcement really started people thinking that maybe this isn’t the job for me.”</p> <p>Law-enforcement agencies across the U.S. have said they are facing staffing shortages as resignations and retirements rise. The tight labor market is compounding what police chiefs describe as waning interest from job seekers amid heightened scrutiny of officers’ actions, a less favorable view of the profession by some Americans and a surge in violent crime.</p> <p>In response, departments have been bumping up bonuses. The small city of Warner Robins, Ga., budgeted for \$4,000 retention and recruitment bonuses this year. Ithaca, N.Y., offers \$20,000 bonuses for hires from other agencies. Last month, Seattle approved \$30,000 bonuses for lateral hires and \$7,500 for new recruits.</p> <p>“You’re hard-pressed to think of a time when police departments had to incentivize hiring with bonuses and pay officers to stay on the force,” said Chuck Wexler, the executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, a think tank focused on policing. “I haven’t seen that ever.”</p> <p>The average salary for police officers was \$70,740 in 2021 compared with \$58,260 for all occupations, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.</p> <p>The number of police officers employed nationally dipped in 2020 after rising over the previous decade, but in 2021 the level was returning to what it was before the pandemic, according to the BLS.</p> <p>Still, cities are eager to replenish their ranks as shootings and homicides have risen sharply. Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell said the departure of more than 460 officers over the past 2½ years created a crisis that has slowed response times and affected investigations.</p> <p>Agencies also are adjusting standards to fill vacancies. Earlier this year, Chicago dropped its college requirement for some recruits.</p> <p>The sheriff’s department in Alameda County, Calif., in the Bay Area, is struggling to keep its ranks filled. “We’re hiring people we wouldn’t normally hire,” said Ray Kelly, a spokesman for the agency.</p> <p>Mr. Kelly said that in September last year, his department hired a 24-year-old who had been let go by another police department for not meeting expectations during his probationary period.</p> <p>Earlier this month, after the man had started on the Alameda force, he was arrested in connection with the murder of a Bay Area couple with his service weapon shortly after he clocked out of work, according to</p>

court documents. The man is currently being held in jail. He is no longer employed by the Alameda sheriff's department. His lawyer declined to comment.

"We're scraping the barrel," Mr. Kelly said, referring to hiring in general.

Philip Stinson, a professor at Bowling Green State University who studies police misconduct, said research shows that loosening hiring requirements makes it more likely that an officer will have problems down the road. "The ultimate danger is you're hiring people who are just not suited for police work," he said.

In Redding, a city of 92,000 two hours south of the California-Oregon border, Chief Schueller was struggling earlier this year to fill 15 open spots. He persuaded city leaders that spending \$40,000 to attract an experienced officer was a better deal than training a new officer at a cost of more than \$75,000.

This spring, Redding police began advertising the new bonus with the tagline: "Come work in a community that supports their police."

"That's one of the things we try and sell to applicants," said Chief Schueller. "When we were getting George Floyd protests, and we had a few, we were also getting Back the Blue rallies."

Since instituting the bonus, Redding has hired 10 officers from all over the state, including Jordan Dormer, a 32-year-old who was working as an officer with the California Highway Patrol in San Francisco.

When Mr. Dormer went on a ride-along with a Redding police officer, he was surprised to find that residents waved to them. He asked whether they were friends, but the officer said that people just liked the police.

"I was like, are you serious?" Mr. Dormer said.

Mr. Dormer, who is from Redding, said he had wanted to work in his hometown in the past but the pay had always been too low. The bonus, he said, was a "big help."

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HEADLINE	09/29 'Quiet quitting' can lead to 'quiet firing'?
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/quiet-quitting-firing-productivity-paranoia-11664390490?mod=hp_lead_pos11
GIST	<p>It can feel like you're getting away with it.</p> <p>You've dialed down the intensity at work, passing on late nights and extra assignments with seemingly no negative consequences. In fact, your boss appears to respect your new boundaries and has lightened your workload.</p> <p>Careful. Your "quiet quitting" can lead to your "quiet firing"—and eventually your <i>actual</i> firing. And it's already happening in some companies, human-resources specialists say.</p> <p>"If all of a sudden you find you're not invited to the meetings you used to be, or being offered the projects, that's an indication that management is not viewing you as well as they used to," says Victor Assad, a former HR director at Medtronic PLC and Honeywell International Inc. who is now a consultant.</p> <p>Much like quiet quitting, the trendy term for reducing effort, quiet firing refers to minimizing an employee's significance. Companies have always had subtle ways to nudge people out the door. Tactics include sidelining them by cutting responsibilities or denying promotions and raises to make someone miserable enough to leave—what the gang in legal calls a "constructive discharge" and the rest of us know as managing out.</p>

The difference now is the scale. Many companies are renewing their focus on what employees put out at the same time that a lot of workers are recalibrating what they put in.

Gallup reports the [ratio of engaged to actively disengaged workers](#) is at the lowest level in a decade and that half of the U.S. workforce is allegedly quiet quitting—that is, doing only what’s in their job descriptions and no more. For much of the past two years, [executives have largely put up](#) with this. In a tight labor market, a warm body is better than nobody.

Plus, companies want to be seen as sensitive to employees who seek balanced work and personal lives, says Paul Lesser, who launched a talent advisory firm last year after a long career in human resources at Fidelity Investments. Events like the pandemic and police killing of George Floyd prompted many to re-evaluate their priorities, he says, and it would have been bad business and worse optics for management to demand a greater focus on work during the most acute periods.

With more businesses [expecting a recession](#), “every company has associates that have been poor performers or haven’t been as productive,” Mr. Lesser says. “In the marketplace we have right now, it’s good corporate hygiene to be looking at them.”

Managers at all levels should form lists of employees to let go if better or harder-working talent becomes available, says Jay McDonald, an executive coach who sits on the board of several Atlanta-area companies.

“A leader should always have that list, at least in their head,” he says.

So, are you on the boss’s list? It’s hard to know, especially now, when some managers are insisting that they [really, truly don’t mind](#) workers not giving 150%.

Some changes, like being asked to do less, could simply indicate that your supervisor takes limits seriously and understands that every team needs role players in addition to all-stars. Or your days might be numbered.

Bosses are at risk, too, says Ash Wendt, president of Cowen Partners Executive Search. He says some businesses that held off on leadership changes during the pandemic have hired his firm to discreetly hunt for upgrades.

These searches to replace executives who will soon get a shove toward the exit are called “confidential backfills.” Last year, they were 15% of Cowen’s business; this year, they’re 30%, he adds. They can amount to quiet firings because the incumbents may be neutralized for months before they’re ousted.

The top complaint about these leaders: “Companies are saying they’ve noticed a drop-off in an executive’s productivity or they’re not holding people accountable like they once did,” Mr. Wendt says.

Workers, unsure where they stand and whether they’re doing enough, are seeking help with job-related anxieties, says Dr. Anisha Patel-Dunn, chief medical officer of [LifeStance Health](#), which provides mental-health services in 32 states.

She cautions against overanalyzing every decision—being left off a project doesn’t necessarily reflect diminished status with the boss.

Still, an uncertain economy and broadscale office returns in many industries put hybrid and remote workers on especially high alert for signs of being managed out.

A large-scale survey by [Microsoft](#) Corp. published this month revealed a wide gap between employees’ assessments of their own remote productivity and managers’ perceptions of how much gets done away from the office. (Some 87% of the rank and file say they’re just as effective at home, but 80% of bosses

	<p>disagree.) Microsoft Chief Executive Satya Nadella scolded supervisors for “productivity paranoia” and assumptions that people aren’t working hard at home, but the study’s findings underscore why certain workers fear falling out of favor.</p> <p>Some firms, including Goldman Sachs Group Inc. and Meta Platforms Inc., have reinstated performance reviews to help identify and cull underachievers, after suspending that practice during the pandemic.</p> <p>One-third of medium-to-large businesses have adopted employee-surveillance systems since 2020, according to Gartner, joining another third that already used such tools.</p> <p>If people who are coasting haven’t been dismissed yet, that could be because the boss is storing a layer of fat that can easily be trimmed when it’s time to downsize, says Leslie Tarnacki, senior vice president of global human resources at WorkForce Software.</p> <p>“We’re kidding ourselves if we don’t think we’re headed toward a recession, and managers do like to have that cushion if they see that cuts may be coming down the road,” she says. “They may have employees that are considered mediocre, but keeping them around for now makes having to deal with those cuts a little bit easier.”</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Iran protesters seek end of morality police
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-protesters-seek-end-of-an-islamic-republic-pillarthe-morality-police-11664383353?mod=hp_listb_pos1
GIST	<p>The protests that have erupted across Iran in the past two weeks are rooted in anger at the country’s morality police, an unpopular vestige of the 1979 revolution that represents a weak point for the government, according to protesters and human-rights advocates.</p> <p>The death of Mahsa Amini, 22, on Sept. 16, while in the custody of the morality police has touched a nerve among many Iranian families, who have had their own humiliating experiences with officers tasked with enforcing the country’s strict Islamic codes for clothing and behavior. Among those protesting are conservative women and men, joining throngs of young secular people who say the enforcement of rules around hijab, or headscarves, for women is often capricious.</p> <p>Iran requires women to dress modestly, to wear no heavy makeup and, above all, to don a hijab, or headscarf. They are forbidden from riding bicycles and motorcycles, among other acts. Such rules are often customary though not mandatory in many Muslim countries.</p> <p>Advocates of the rules have called them Iran’s “last stand” on strict Islamic morality, with polls showing that a growing majority of the country is secular and opposed to the mandatory hijab. Large swaths of the country are fervent adherents to a conservative strain of Shiite Islam, and some men independently enforce the hijab laws on the streets. Even clerics seen as moderates support the hijab laws.</p> <p>President Ebrahim Raisi, a conservative cleric elected last year, has made enforcing the hijab laws a priority. In August, his government unveiled stricter hijab laws, and U.S. officials and human-rights organization that monitor Iran said they saw an uptick in arrests this summer of women for violating the new rules.</p> <p>Even before the most recent protests, the rules had driven unrest and caused some women to flee the country.</p> <p>Shima Babaei was 14 years old when she walked out of a movie theater in central Tehran, and a vice-squad officer grabbed her by the hand and tried to shove her into a car.</p>

Ms. Babaei said her father struggled with the officer, who said she wasn't properly covered up, as all women and girls in Iran must do from puberty. A crowd gathered, she said. Outnumbered, the officers let her go.

"I never forgot that memory," said Ms. Babaei, now 28, who lives in Belgium after leaving Iran following an arrest in 2018 over protests against the mandatory hijab.

Under Iran's laws, a woman not wearing the hijab can be jailed for 10 days to two months, fined and receive lashes.

"Growing up in Iran, it's impossible to know someone, a young woman who has not been arrested because of allegedly wearing her hijab improperly," said Yeganeh Rezaian, an Iranian journalist and researcher with the Committee to Protect Journalists in Washington, at an Atlantic Council discussion on Tuesday.

In a leaderless, incremental push over the past decade, women have pushed back, with the help of male relatives and supporters. In recent months, it had become common in Tehran to see women on motorcycles wearing tight jeans and no headscarf.

The anger of women is palpable in the most recent demonstrations. They are cutting their hair on the streets, burning their headscarves and confronting authorities.

"Woman! Life! Freedom!" is a familiar chant in protests.

The authorities have responded fiercely to the protests, which the government has called riots, and in defense of the hijab laws. More than 40 protesters have been killed, more than 500 injured and more than 1,000 arrested in a sweeping crackdown that has also shut down the Internet for much of the country.

Tehran has also responded with repeated bombardment of Kurdish areas in northern Iraq after publicly blaming Iranian Kurdish separatist groups based in Iraq for fomenting unrest in Iran. On Wednesday, the strikes resumed with more intensity as Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps attacked Iranian Kurdish camps and bases near Erbil and other northern Iraqi cities, using armed drones and dozens of missiles. The attacks killed nine people, including one civilian, and left more than 30 more wounded, according to a statement by Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government.

In Washington, the White House condemned the attack. "Iran cannot deflect blame from its internal problems and the legitimate grievances of its population with attacks across its borders," Jake Sullivan, the national security advisor, said in a statement.

Ms. Amini, a Kurdish visitor to Tehran, was arrested while visiting the capital with her family, allegedly for inappropriate clothing. In interviews with Persian media, her mother and father have said she was dressed properly under Iran's hijab laws.

Saeid Dehghan, an Iranian human-rights lawyer has represented women arrested by the morality police, said Iranian Islamic law on the hijab is vague, using terms like "forbidden acts" and "shariah veil" that "give wide discretion to police officers to be abusive to the public."

The importance of the laws is illustrated by their history of enforcement. They were once the province of the country's powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the sprawling paramilitary group that is tasked with defending the system and stamping out a counter-revolution.

Iranians in their 40s and 50s recall running and hiding from the IRGC street patrols, which ensured women wore headscarves and also long, loose-fitting robes.

"We grew up with horrible experiences," said one Iranian woman, a 52-year-old doctor who supports the protests. "We don't want to live like this. We don't want forced hijab."

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the former president, tightened the hijab laws and enforcement during his tenure from 2005 to 2013, creating the modern version of the morality police, and empowering them.

Their white vans became a familiar and feared site throughout the country. The group often conducts checkpoints in crowded areas and outside Tehran Metro stations and takes women back to the Vozara detention center, a drab, two-story building that faces a pine-tree-lined park frequented by local families and tourists.

There, according to women interviewed by The Wall Street Journal, officers often strip search female detainees and put them in cells. In the same building are men rounded up for violating vice laws against drinking and prostitution. A trip to Vozara became a mark of shame for a woman's family.

"The mental and emotional torture that these girls constantly struggle with in the detention center is usually overlooked. Sometimes it even leads to suicide," said Mr. Dehghan.

Protests against the hijab laws became more forceful during the presidency of Hassan Rouhani, who was viewed as moderate within Iran and had spoken against aggressive morality police tactics. Women staged protests in which they took off their veils and burned them.

Among them was Azam Jangravi, who climbed onto an electricity transformer box and removed her veil as part of what became known as the Girls of Enghelab Avenue protests. She said police threw her down and arrested her, taking her to Vozara, where she was kept in solitary confinement for four days.

She said a judge interrogating her called her a prostitute, took away her driving privileges and threatened to remove her daughter from her custody. Ms. Jangravi decided to flee to Turkey with her eight-year-old daughter in 2018, later resettling to Canada.

"I was scared, I was broken," she said.

In Tehran, protesters say they want more than the end of the hijab laws. They have chanted for the death of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and the downfall of the Islamic Republic itself.

"The problem is the system," said one woman who has been picked up by the morality police, a 45-year-old housewife. "The whole system should shut down."

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HEADLINE	09/28 British pound loses dominance
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/28/business/economy/uk-pound-history.html
GIST	<p>Britain's pound coin — rimmed in nickel and brass with an embossed image of Queen Elizabeth II at the center — could always be counted on to be significantly more valuable than the dollar.</p> <p>Such boasting rights effectively came to an end this week when the value of the pound sank to its lowest recorded level: £1 = \$1.03 after falling more than 20 percent this year.</p> <p>The nearly one-to-one parity between the currencies sounded the close of a chapter in Britain's history nearly as much as the metronomic footfalls of the procession that carried the queen's funeral bier up the pavement to Windsor Castle.</p> <p>"The queen's death for many people brought to an end a long era of which the soft power in the United Kingdom" was paramount, said Ian Goldin, professor of globalization and development at the University of Oxford. "The pound's demise to its lowest level is sort of indicative of this broader decline in multiple dimensions."</p> <p>The immediate cause of the pound's alarming fall on Monday was the announcement of a spending and tax plan by Britain's new Conservative government, which promised steep tax cuts that primarily</p>

benefited the wealthiest individuals along with expensive measures to help blunt the painful rise in energy prices on consumers and businesses.

The sense of crisis ramped up Wednesday when the [Bank of England](#) intervened, in a rare move, and warned of “material risk to U.K. financial stability” from the government’s plan. The central bank said it would start buying British government bonds “on whatever scale is necessary” to stem a sell-off in British debt.

The Bank of England’s emergency action seemed at odds with its efforts that began months ago to try to slow the nearly 10 percent annual inflation rate, which has lifted the price of essentials like petrol and food to painful levels.

The swooning pound this week has carried an unmistakable political message, amounting to a no-confidence vote by the world’s financial community in the economic strategy proposed by Prime Minister Liz Truss and her chancellor of the Exchequer, Kwasi Kwarteng.

To Mr. Goldin, the pound’s journey indicates a decline in economic and political influence that accelerated when Britain voted to leave the European Union in 2016. In many respects, Britain already has the worst performing economy, aside from Russia, of the 38-member Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

“It’s just a question of time before it falls out of the top 10 economies in the world,” Mr. Goldin said. [Britain ranks sixth](#), having been surpassed by India.

Eswar Prasad, an economist at Cornell University, said this latest plunge had delivered a bracing blow to Britain’s standing. A series of “self-inflicted wounds,” including Brexit and the government’s latest spending plan, have accelerated the pound’s slide and further endangered London’s status as a global financial center.

Dozens of currencies, including the euro, the Japanese yen and the Chinese renminbi, have slumped in recent weeks. Rising interest rates and a relatively bright economic outlook in the United States combined with turmoil in the global economy have made [investments in dollars](#) particularly appealing.

But the revival by the Truss government of an extreme version of Thatcher and Reagan-era “trickle-down” economic policies elicited a brutal response.

“The problem isn’t that the U.K. budget was inflationary,” wrote Dario Perkins, a managing director at TS Lombard, a research firm, on [Twitter](#). “It’s that it was moronic.”

During the more than 1,000 years in which the pound sterling has reigned as Britain’s national currency, it has suffered its share of ups and downs. Its value in the modern era could never match the value of an actual pound of silver, which in the 10th century could buy 15 cows.

Over the centuries, British leaders have often gone to extraordinary lengths to protect the pound’s value, viewing its strength as a sign of the country’s economic power and influence. King Henry I issued a [decree](#) in 1125 ordering that those who produced substandard currency “lose their right hand and be castrated.”

In the 1960s, the Labour government under Harold Wilson so resisted devaluing the pound — then set at a fixed rate of \$2.80, high enough to be holding back the British economy — that he ordered cabinet papers discussing the idea to be [burned](#). In 1967, the government finally [cut its value](#) by 14 percent to \$2.40.

Other economic crises thrashed the pound. In the 1970s, when oil prices skyrocketed and Britain’s inflation rate topped 25 percent, the government was compelled to ask the International Monetary Fund for a \$3.9 billion loan. In the mid-1980s, when high U.S. interest rates and a Reagan administration spending spree jacked up the dollar’s value, the pound fell to a then record low.

The pound's dominance has been waning since the end of World War II. Today, the global economy is experiencing a particularly tumultuous time as it recovers from the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic, supply chain breakdowns, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, an energy shortage and soaring inflation.

As Richard Portes, an economics professor at London Business School, said, currency exchanges have enormous swings over time. The euro was worth 82 cents in its early days, he recalled, and people referred to it as a "toilet paper" currency. But by 2008, its value had doubled to \$1.60.

What might cause the pound to revive is not clear.

The Truss government's economic program has forcefully accelerated the pound's slide — the latest in a series of what many economists consider egregious economic missteps that peaked with Brexit. Much depends on the Truss government.

"The plunge in the pound is the result of policy choices, not some historical inevitability" said Ian Shepherdson, chief U.S. economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics. "Whether this is a new, grim era or just an unfortunate interlude depends on whether they reverse course or are kicked out at the next election."

As it happens, the Bank of England is preparing to issue new pound bank notes and coins featuring King Charles III, at the very moment that the pound has dropped to record lows.

"The death of the queen and the fall of the pound do seem jointly to signify decisively the end of an era," Mr. Prasad of Cornell said. "These two events could be considered markers in a long historical procession in the British economy and the pound sterling becoming far less important than they once were."

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HEADLINE	09/28 Who should get a Covid booster? When?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/28/briefing/boosters-covid-omicron.html
GIST	<p>About 40,000 Americans died of Covid this summer. That toll means that Covid is continuing to kill many more people each day than vehicle crashes, gun violence, the flu or many other health threats.</p> <p>The situation is especially tragic because most of these Covid deaths could have been prevented — if only more Americans had received vaccine shots, including booster shots for older people and others with vulnerable health.</p> <p>...Covid is killing almost nobody under 50 and is hospitalizing very few people. The death and hospitalization rates also remain low among older people who are boosted. And in all of these groups, severe Covid illness is concentrated among people who have significant underlying medical problems.</p> <p>The main reason so many Americans are still dying from Covid is that vaccination and booster rates are not higher. Only about half of adults have received a booster shot, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation's most recent poll. More than 20 percent have not received any vaccine shot.</p> <p>I know that there is still a lot of confusion about booster shots — including about the new version, known as a bivalent booster. Today's newsletter will offer answers to some common questions.</p> <p>Do boosters matter?</p> <p>Yes, boosters matter, as the charts above show. The biggest benefit is a reduction in severe illness among vulnerable people, as Jennifer Nuzzo, an epidemiologist at Brown University, told me. For that reason, anybody over 50 who has not yet received a booster shot in 2022 should consider getting one as soon as possible.</p> <p>(One exception: If you recently had Covid, you should wait several months before getting a booster, as my colleague Dani Blum explains.)</p>

The most effective way to reduce Covid deaths, however, does not involve boosters. It involves persuading more unvaccinated Americans to get their first shot. Their risks are far higher than the risks facing the unboosted. Unfortunately, public health officials acknowledge that they don't know how to increase that number very much. About four-fifths of the unvaccinated — a group that is [disproportionately Republican](#) — say they will “definitely not” get a shot, according to Kaiser.

Covid remains so deadly largely because millions of Americans have decided they would rather accept its risks than receive a vaccine shot.

Do younger people need one?

Whether to get a booster shot is a closer call for healthy people under 50, many experts believe. Rates of severe Covid are already so low among this group that booster shots don't seem to have a huge health benefit. Of course, the downsides of the shots also seem to be small, because research has consistently shown them [to be safe](#).

But getting a booster shot is not wholly without downsides. Some people are fearful of needles or prefer to avoid taking unnecessary medicines. Other people [were sick for a day or two](#) after getting an earlier Covid shot and would prefer not to repeat the experience. For hourly workers and single parents, a day in bed can also bring financial or logistical burdens, especially in a country without guaranteed [sick leave](#) or [child care](#).

For these reasons, many experts stop short of telling younger adults and children that they need to be boosted. “I'm not in the camp of saying if you're under 50, you have to do it,” Andy Slavitt, a former Covid adviser to President Biden and former head of Medicare and Medicaid, told me. “Reasonable people could come out on different sides of it.” Similarly, Dr. Paul Sax, a leader of the infectious-disease division at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, said, “I don't think it's as clear for young healthy people as for older people to get the booster.”

Still, if you're a booster skeptic, I would encourage you to keep in mind that many of these same experts — including Sax and Slavitt — are encouraging the younger adults in their own families to get booster shots.

Why? For one thing, the data suggests that a booster reduces a person's chances of being infected with Covid, at least for a few months, and even a moderate Covid infection can keep somebody in bed for days. It can sometimes lead to longer-term symptoms, too. Perhaps most important, a younger person could infect an older person for whom Covid might be more severe.

“You're doing it for your family and your friends,” Dr. Ashish Jha, the White House's Covid coordinator, [told The Washington Post](#). The Biden administration has recently changed its guidance to recommend that all eligible people 12 and above receive a booster shot with one of the updated vaccines. Jha recently said that he expected a Covid shot to become an annual ritual, like a flu shot.

In some cases, it may make sense for younger, healthy people to schedule their next Covid shot to line up with their risk of exposure to the virus, including the chance that they would infect a more vulnerable person. Nuzzo — who's under 50, without underlying health conditions — told me that she was waiting to get her next booster until shortly before the holidays. “I do appreciate the temporary added benefit against infection and want to time that protection to correspond to when I am most likely to be exposed to Covid,” she said.

I'm 49 and got my second booster — a bivalent booster, this time — a few weeks ago. I did not want to enter the colder fall weather without updated protection. But I understand why others, especially younger people, may decide to wait.

What about new boosters?

	<p>Pfizer and Moderna began offering bivalent booster shots in September, designed to combat Omicron subvariants of the Covid virus. Tests in animals have suggested that the shots will do a better job preventing infections than earlier vaccine shots.</p> <p>So far, the real-world evidence is unclear. “The truth is,” Slavitt says, “we don’t know.” The situation will become clearer once the C.D.C. releases more data in coming weeks.</p> <p>But most people don’t need to worry too much about these fine differences. The new boosters, like the earlier versions, are likely to be extremely effective at preventing severe illness, scientists say. For people who are more vulnerable to severe Covid, either because of age or a health condition, the best advice has not changed: Stay up-to-date on your Covid boosters.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Ian bludgeons southwestern Florida
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/28/us/hurricane-ian-florida-storm-surge.html
GIST	<p>TAMPA, Fla. — Hurricane Ian bludgeoned its way through southwestern Florida on Wednesday as one of the most powerful storms to ever strike the state, bringing fierce winds, unrelenting rains and drastic inundations to coastal communities that were overtaken by the surging waters of the Gulf of Mexico.</p> <p>Floridians braced for extensive and catastrophic damage around Fort Myers, near where Ian made landfall as a Category 4 storm, with winds up to 150 miles per hour, at approximately 3:05 p.m. But a huge stretch of coastline from Naples to Sarasota appeared severely affected by lapping brown waves that drowned streets, cars and homes as frightened residents sought refuge.</p> <p>The storm was so massive that almost the entire state faced warnings about its possible effects, with officials fearing widespread inland flooding — as much as two feet in some areas — and more storm surge along Florida’s Atlantic Coast on Thursday, when Ian is expected to cut diagonally across the peninsula. It is forecast to move offshore around Daytona Beach by Thursday evening, before turning north toward Georgia and South Carolina.</p> <p>Ian will go down in history as one of the worst storms to hit the state, Gov. Ron DeSantis said, after the Labor Day Hurricane in 1935, Hurricane Andrew in 1992 and Hurricane Michael in 2018.</p> <p>It will “rank as one of the top five hurricanes to ever hit the Florida peninsula,” he said.</p> <p>The authorities linked at least one death to the storm hours before landfall. More than 2 million customers were without electricity in the state by late Tuesday.</p> <p>Not since Hurricane Charley buzz-sawed through Southwest Florida in 2004, making landfall almost exactly where Ian did, had the densely populated, suburban communities around Fort Myers suffered a direct hit. But while the former was a compact, fast-moving storm that inflicted destruction mostly with its winds, the latter lumbered ashore with such sheer size that it dwarfed Charley.</p> <p>In Lee County, which is home to Fort Myers, officials said they did not yet have a clear picture of the damage. But, the county manager, Roger Desjarlais, said at a news briefing: “We are beginning to get a sense that our community has been, in some respects, decimated.”</p> <p>The storm first made landfall on the barrier island of Cayo Costa, west of Fort Myers, and later on the mainland near Punta Gorda, about 25 miles north of Fort Myers.</p> <p>The wind was so intense at Robert Goodman’s home in the Gulf Harbor neighborhood of Fort Myers that he and his son-in-law had to physically hold their sliding doors shut to keep it out. He was under a mandatory evacuation order, but decided to stay.</p>

“I don’t know what’s worse, being here for it or leaving. I’d be stressed out either way,” Mr. Goodman, 60, said, adding, “And the flooding hasn’t even started yet.”

Lilya Cattani, 40, rode out the storm with her husband and their two toddlers in South Fort Myers, in another area under mandatory evacuation orders. Water came in through the front door, she said, and was also blown in through their second-story windows.

“We have been trying to do everything we can to keep the kids entertained and not let them see how scared we are,” she said around the time the storm was making landfall.

Later in the afternoon, Ms. Cattani said by text that her and her husband’s cars were completely submerged in their garage, adding, “It’s an ocean around us.”

Videos showed storm surge in Fort Myers Beach reaching nearly to the roofs of some one-story homes, with streets turned into rivers. Just to the west, large swaths of the barrier island of Sanibel also appeared to be underwater.

Forecasters projected up to 18 feet of storm surge in some areas, though Mr. DeSantis said it might have peaked at 12 feet. Water levels in Naples reached more than six feet above normal high tide, a record. The previous record of 4.25 feet above high tide there was set in 2017 during Hurricane Irma, the storm that had most recently swamped the region.

The most vulnerable communities up and down the Gulf Coast had been under evacuation orders — which many, if not most, people seemed to heed. Even inland residents sought shelter: Busloads of farmworkers arrived at a high school in Plant City, Fla., east of Tampa, on Wednesday morning, to escape their mobile homes.

Among the evacuees at another shelter was Arthur H. Hembree, 63, who has ridden out plenty of hurricanes in his nearly 50 years of living in Florida.

There was the one in the 1980s that he spent playing Nintendo in his trailer home as the water rose toward his doorstep. During Hurricane Charley, he cowered with his landlord’s Rottweiler, Chopper, in the back of a junkyard pickup. And in 2018, Hurricane Michael sent him scrambling for cover through the drive-up window of an old bank.

But when he heard how bad Ian might be, he decided his days of disregarding hurricane warnings were over. On Wednesday, he was one of more than 6,000 people who had arrived at shelters in Hillsborough County, which includes Tampa. Mr. Hembree, who is retired from a job cleaning oil tankers and uses a wheelchair, was staying at a shelter at Erwin Technical College that had been designated for people with special needs.

“I live two blocks from the Hillsborough River,” he said as he took a drag of a cigarillo outside the building. “We’re not going through this again.”

Instead of bringing storm surge to Tampa Bay — one of forecasters’ biggest fears when it comes to storms hitting Florida — Hurricane Ian pushed the water out, leaving it less than a foot deep in some areas. The phenomenon, which also occurred during Hurricane Irma, is sometimes referred to as a reverse, or negative, storm surge. Winds to the north of the storm blew in from the east, pushing water away from the shoreline, said Christopher Slocum, a physical scientist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Florida has one of the most rigorous building codes in the country, a result of construction rules adopted after Hurricane Andrew destroyed tens of thousands of homes in South Florida in 1992. In more recent storms, such as Hurricane Irma, structures built under modern codes have performed better than older buildings. By contrast, in states without mandatory and up-to-date building codes, such as Tennessee and Kentucky, the damage from extreme weather events tends to be far worse.

Though the full extent of the havoc Hurricane Ian has wreaked in Southwest Florida will not be known for some time, other parts of the state that were pounded by the storm assessed their flood damage on Wednesday.

The death of a 34-year-old man in Martin County, on the east coast north of Palm Beach County, was being investigated as tied to the storm. Officials said the man had been clearing debris in a yard and was found face down in 10 inches of water.

Tornadoes were reported in Broward County, overturning small planes, stripping siding from homes and uprooting trees.

And in Key West, where storm surge had swept over the tourist strip of Duval Street, businesses opened their doors wide to dry out the wet floors. The authorities predicted even worse flooding through Friday because of high tides.

Eko Kereselidze and her friend, Dea Tinikashvili, had prepared as best they could by storing important documents in vacuum-sealed plastic and propping large appliances in the carport off the ground. The washer was up on bricks and the clothes dryer on a chair.

At one point during the storm, they found a man standing on the corner in the pelting rain, holding bags of his belongings. His home had flooded and he fled on foot. They took the stranger in.

"I feel like they did not prepare us for this," Ms. Tinikashvili said, lamenting that the warnings from county officials were not strident enough. "They did not say: 'Get ready for one or two feet of water in your house.'"

In Lee County, however, the emergency alert system warned residents by phone to go to the highest spot in their homes if water rushed in.

"Responders begin rescues after the storm passes," the message relayed via text and phone calls said. "This could last all night."

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HEADLINE	09/29 Paraguay to Taiwan: \$1B to remain allies
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/29/paraguay-asks-taiwan-to-invest-1bn-to-remain-allies-china
GIST	<p>Paraguay, one of Taiwan's few remaining formal allies, has asked the island's government for \$1bn (£930m) in investment to ensure it can resist pressure to switch its diplomatic ties to China.</p> <p>In an interview with the Financial Times, Paraguay's president, Mario Abdo Benítez, said his government was working with Taiwan's to ensure Paraguayans felt "the real benefits of the strategic alliance".</p> <p>"There is Taiwanese investment of more than \$6bn in countries which don't have diplomatic relations with Taiwan, we want from that \$1bn to be put in Paraguay," he said. "That will help us to build the argument about the importance of this strategic alliance with Taiwan."</p> <p>China claims Taiwan as a province which it intends to one day annex. Taiwan's government maintains it is a sovereign nation. While Taiwan has widespread global support in the face of China's aggression, no country around the world can recognise both governments, and Paraguay is one of just 14 which has formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan instead of China. Most are concentrated in Latin America and the Pacific, but in recent years China has convinced several, including Solomon Islands, Panama, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua to switch ties, with promises of increased trade, loans, and investment.</p>

	<p>Dr Mark Harrison, a senior lecturer in Chinese studies at the University of Tasmania, said Taiwan was always at risk of losing allies, and such comments were sometimes a signal of a debate about switching.</p> <p>“However, following the developments in the Pacific over the last several years, there is a greater awareness in the US and elsewhere that switching recognition from Taipei to Beijing can be the first step to other security and economic links with China, so no doubt there will be diplomatic work under way from a number of countries to understand Asunción’s position on continuing relations with Taiwan.”</p> <p>Paraguay has a GDP of about \$39bn, of which 30% comes from agriculture. Abdo Benítez suggested Paraguay’s continued relationship with Taiwan over China had cost the country dearly. He told the Financial Times the lack of access to the Chinese market was upsetting Paraguay’s export producers. He also said it had a detrimental impact on Paraguay’s ability to obtain Covid-19 vaccines when they were largely only available from China.</p> <p>On Thursday, Paraguay’s foreign affairs minister, Julio César Arriola, appeared to walk back Abdo Benítez’s comments, according to a press conference by Taiwan’s ministry of foreign affairs.</p> <p>According to the ministry spokeswoman, Joanne Ou, Arriola spoke to Taiwan’s ambassador to Paraguay to “clarify” that the relationship between the two countries was “based on common values and ideas” and there was no quid pro quo.</p> <p>According to Ou, Arriola said that “what President Abdo emphasised in the exclusive interview is that Paraguay has excellent investment conditions and hopes that Taiwanese businessmen can enter the South American market by investing in Paraguay, which is of great significance to the establishment of a strategic partnership between Taiwan and Paraguay”.</p> <p>Ou said Taiwan’s government would continue to encourage local businesses to invest in Paraguay.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Seattle income needed afford starter home?
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/how-much-money-do-you-need-to-make-to-afford-a-starter-home-in-seattle#
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — People in Seattle need to make more money to afford the purchase of a starter home than buyers in New York City, Miami and the District Columbia.</p> <p>In fact, Seattle residents need to bring in a larger annual income to buy a starter home than people in all but six major cities in the United States, according to a new report from realtor.com.</p> <p>The median two-bedroom home price is \$609,950 in the Emerald City, according to data from realtor.com, making the estimated monthly payment — calculated using a 6.25% mortgage rate and 10% down payment on a 30-year mortgage — \$4,254. That means a potential starter-homebuyer must make \$170,171 a year to afford the home.</p> <p>Only San Jose (\$245,234), San Francisco (\$239,933), Los Angeles (\$195,294), Honolulu (\$191,109), San Diego (\$186,645) and Boston (\$183,855) boast larger estimated required incomes.</p> <p>In Portland, where the median two-bedroom home costs \$425,000 and the estimated monthly payment totals \$2,964, the estimated required income for a starter-home purchase is \$118,571, according to realtor.com. Spokane, with a median two-bedroom home sales price of \$299,900 and \$2,092 monthly payment, requires an annual income of \$83,670.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Spokane top-25 most neighborly cities
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SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/spokane-county/spokane-one-of-the-most-neighbor-friendly-cities/293-58271150-d26c-4738-bc8f-97ce22a4882c
GIST	<p>SPOKANE COUNTY, Wash. — Spokane made it into the top 25 list of the most neighborly cities in the U.S.</p> <p>According to a survey by the Neighbor Blog, three factors that put Spokane and other 24 cities on the list included the lack of traveling due to inflation, engaging with their community as a result of the pandemic and accepting their neighbors' political affiliations.</p> <p>Each year, the survey analyzes a variety of publicly available data sets related to charitable giving, generosity, happiness, well-being of residents and other factors that contribute to a city's overall neighborliness.</p> <p>Nearly 30% of people said on the survey that they hang out with their neighbors and local friends more often due to the increase in gas prices and plane tickets. About 42.5% of people said they are more willing than before to help out a neighbor.</p> <p>Despite a big and seemingly divisive election this year, 45% of people said in the survey that they recognize that their neighbors have different political affiliations than their own, but choose to be neighborly anyway.</p> <p>The survey also asked participants what factors they think make communities most neighborly and found volunteering, charitable giving and neighborly acts were the top factors. These aspects were followed by nonprofits per capita, happiness and residents' proximity to local parks.</p> <p>The survey also asked participants what factors detract from a city's neighborliness. Participants mostly cited crime, which carried negative weight. The cities that ranked highest in those categories moved lower on the overall list.</p> <p>Spokane has been listed as one of America's most neighbor friendly cities for the second year in a row. It fell from number 19 in 2021 to number 25 this year.</p> <p>The cities that made it into the top five list with the most neighborly neighborhoods are Rochester, New York, Madison Wisconsin, Provo, Utah, Oxnard, California and Grand Rapids, Minnesota.</p> <p>Other cities in the list include Seattle, Toledo, Salt Lake City, Honolulu and Allentown.</p> <p>In the survey, 41% of participants said it took a week to meet their neighbors and 74% answered they have done a favor to their neighbors in the past year.</p> <p>In the survey, 52% of participants said with less travel due to the pandemic and inflation, they feel more connected to their neighborhood and their community. Also 43% participants said they're more willing to help a neighbor out when they ask or need it most as a result of the pandemic.</p> <p>According to the survey, Spokane residents have high rates of volunteering and 87% of them live within a 10-minute walk of a park.</p> <p>Participants in the survey ranged from 16-54 years old. 43% were men and 57% were women.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Cost for new driver's license to rise Oct 1
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/cost-to-get-new-washington-licenses-increase-starting-oct-1
GIST	WASHINGTON - If you need an enhanced Washington state driver's license or ID, you'll have to pay more at the Department of Licensing as fees will increase starting Oct. 1.

	<p>On Oct. 1, enhanced state IDs will cost \$3 more per-year than they do now-- so a six-year license/ID will cost \$18 more, and an eight-year license will cost \$24 more. The fee increase also applies to renewals.</p> <p>By this time next year, an enhanced/REAL ID will be required to fly domestically, get into federal and military buildings, and cross the U.S. border.</p> <p>In addition to the enhanced license/ID fee, a few other increases take effect in October, per the Department of Licensing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driver abstract fee: A driver abstract is a summary of a person's driving record. It is often used by employers or prospective employers, data brokers, volunteer organizations, insurance carriers, alcohol and drug assessment or treatment agencies, or other entities. The cost will increase from \$13 to \$15 on Oct. 1, 2022, and then to \$17 on July 1, 2029. • Driver license photo and update-only fee: This covers a replacement license or ID card to correct or update information, such as obtaining a new photo or updating an address. The cost will increase from \$10 to \$20 starting Oct. 1, 2022. <p>The fee increase is the result of legislative action to help fund Move Ahead Washington, a nearly \$17 billion transportation package signed into law earlier this year.</p> <p>In July, drivers also saw an increase of up to \$40 for certain services regarding state license plates as a result.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Intercepted calls: Russia army in disarray
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/09/28/world/europe/russian-soldiers-phone-calls-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>KYIV — The Ukrainian capital was supposed to fall in a matter of days.</p> <p>But plagued by tactical errors and fierce Ukrainian resistance, President Vladimir V. Putin's destructive advance quickly stalled, and his forces became bogged down for most of March on the city's outskirts.</p> <p>From trenches, dugouts and in occupied homes in the area around Bucha, a western suburb of Kyiv, Russian soldiers disobeyed orders by making unauthorized calls from their cellphones to their wives, girlfriends, friends and parents hundreds of miles from the front line.</p> <p>Someone else was listening in: the Ukrainian government.</p> <p>The New York Times has exclusively obtained recordings of thousands of calls that were made throughout March and intercepted by Ukrainian law enforcement agencies from this pivotal location.</p> <p>Reporters verified the authenticity of these calls by cross-referencing the Russian phone numbers with messaging apps and social media profiles to identify soldiers and family members. The Times spent almost two months translating the recordings, which have been edited for clarity and length.</p> <p>The calls, made by dozens of fighters from airborne units and Russia's National Guard, have not previously been made public and give an inside view of a military in disarray just weeks into the campaign. The soldiers describe a crisis in morale and a lack of equipment, and say they were lied to about the mission they were on — all conditions that have contributed to the recent setbacks for Russia's campaign in the east of Ukraine.</p> <p>The conversations range from the mundane to the brutal, and include blunt criticisms of Mr. Putin and military commanders, remarks that may be punishable under Russian law if they were publicly expressed at home. The Times is using only the first names of the soldiers, and is withholding the names of family members in order to protect their identities.</p>

Soldiers complain about strategic blunders and a dire shortage of supplies. They confess to capturing and killing non-combatants, and they openly admit to looting Ukrainian homes and businesses. Many say they want to terminate their military contracts, and they rebut the propaganda broadcast by Russian news media back home with the stark realities of the war around them.

‘Things aren’t going well here.’

Within two weeks of the invasion, the soldiers seem to realize that Kyiv is out of reach. After Ukrainian forces stage ambushes and cut off the key access route to the capital, Russian soldiers tell their relatives that the military strategy is failing. They express surprise at the “professional” Ukrainian forces and often use the term “khokhol,” a slur directed at Ukrainians. One named Yevgeniy says bluntly, “We’re losing.”

Soldiers describe tactical blunders and complain about their lack of weaponry and basic equipment, like night vision devices and proper bulletproof vests.

By mid-March, three weeks into the invasion, they report heavy losses.

Nikita, a soldier with the 656th Regiment of the National Guard, tells his partner that 90 men were killed around him when they were ambushed while driving. On a phone shared by members of the 331st Airborne Regiment, a soldier named Semyon estimates that a third of his regiment was killed. Another describes rows of coffins containing the bodies of 400 young paratroopers waiting to be returned home from an airport hangar.

Soldiers of the 331st Airborne Regiment report that the entire Second Battalion of 600 soldiers has been wiped out. A soldier named Andrey tells his father that more than half of his regiment is “gone.” They say that their regiment commander, Sergey Sukharev, has been killed in the fighting, an event confirmed by [contemporaneous news reports](#).

Back home in Russia, the phone calls reveal that the mounting deaths are beginning to reverberate in military towns, where tight-knit communities and families exchange news of casualties. Relatives describe rows of corpses and coffins arriving in their cities, as soldiers warn that even more bodies will soon return. One woman tells her husband that a military funeral was held every day that week. In shock, some families say they have begun to see psychologists.

‘Civilians are lying around everywhere.’

Even as the bodies of dead Russian soldiers are returning home, those of Ukrainian civilians are mounting in the streets and forests around Bucha.

When [images of those dead bodies](#) led to a global outcry in early April, Mr. Putin and other high-ranking Russian leaders repeatedly [denied wrongdoing](#) and described the atrocities as a “[provocation and fake](#).”

But during their occupation of these areas in March, Mr. Putin’s forces recounted in horror what they had witnessed.

In what may amount to evidence of war crimes, a soldier named Sergey confesses to his girlfriend that his captain ordered the execution of three men who were “walking past our storehouse,” and that he has become “a killer.”

As the week passes, Sergey tells his mother about the “mountain of corpses” in the forest.

A soldier with the 331st Airborne Regiment named Andrey tells his wife that he threatened to kill a drunk Ukrainian man and throw his body in the forest where no one would find it. Later, Sergey says that a commander has ordered them to do the same.

When Russian forces retreated at the end of March, Ukrainian officials discovered over 1,100 bodies in the Bucha region, on streets and in gardens, stashed in wells and cellars, and buried in makeshift graves. Some

were charred or [had their hands bound](#). Some 617 of those people died as a result of gunshot wounds, Andriy Nebytov, Kyiv's regional police chief, told The Times.

'The mood is so negative.'

Throughout the stalled offensive — and before the Russian forces would ultimately retreat at the end of March — the phone calls reveal a crisis in morale. Impatience, fear and fatigue set in as soldiers describe a military in disarray. "Frankly speaking, nobody understands why we have to fight this war," Sergey tells his girlfriend.

Other soldiers complain of freezing temperatures and frostbite, harsh sleeping conditions and logistical failures. Soldiers say they raided a butcher shop and killed chickens, piglets and an ostrich for food.

Many of the soldiers express contempt for their commanders, whom they hold responsible for deadly tactical decisions. And some brazenly criticize the highest of their "higher-ups," President Putin.

'I'll quit at once.'

Frustrated by continuous setbacks and fearing for their lives, Russian soldiers say they are fed up with the military. They consider cutting their contracts short or even deserting.

Several soldiers fear the consequences, saying they've been told — sometimes by their commanders — that they could face prosecution and imprisonment.

The scare tactic had no legal grounds at the time, Sergey Krivenko, a Russian human rights lawyer, told The Times. But in September, days before Mr. Putin announced a mobilization to draft hundreds of thousands of civilians, Russian lawmakers [approved harsher punishments](#) for desertion, insubordination and evading military service.

Many are motivated to stay for another reason: They need the pay. In addition to their monthly salaries, soldiers say they are earning the equivalent of \$53 per day in combat pay, which is triple the average salary in the soldiers' hometowns like Pskov, where many of the airborne troops sent to take Kyiv are from.

The soldiers' loved ones respond in different ways. Some encourage them to leave, others ask them to remain strong. One wife says: "I don't need your fucking money. I just need my husband back."

'What TV do you want? LG or Samsung?'

Throughout the campaign, the soldiers brag about what may amount to more war crimes: looting. They occupy civilian homes, sleep in their beds and take their clothes. When they discover cash, they steal it.

Aleksandr, a medic in the 237th Airborne Regiment, marvels at the wealth of Ukrainians who are "rolling in money." Several soldiers promise to bring "trophies" back home to their families, who are variously pleased and dismayed by the looting.

Nothing appeared too big or too small for the taking, including extension cords and Christmas lights, blenders and construction tools, fishing gear and even a toothbrush.

Some of the loot makes it back to Russia. Previously published [security camera footage](#) from a shipping company in Belarus and shipping documents obtained by The Times confirmed that soldiers from the 656th Regiment of the National Guard, the same unit identified with some of the call intercepts, sent packages home in the days after withdrawing. The documents record at least one soldier, Aleksandr, whom The Times identified in the intercepts as an owner of one of the cellphones used, shipping clothes to his wife on April 4.

'What are they saying on the news?'

	<p>Cut off from the outside world and frustrated by commanders who the soldiers say keep them in the dark, the soldiers rely on the calls home for updates on the war they're fighting. But what they hear from their families — a rosy picture propagated by Russian state media — is often at odds with their reality.</p> <p>Sergey disputes the disinformation in separate candid conversations with his mother.</p> <p>The families share how they're feeling the effects of sanctions and how the price of staple items is rising. They bemoan the closing of brands like McDonald's, H&M and Ikea, and the blackout of media companies.</p> <p>'Not our problem anymore.'</p> <p>On the afternoon of March 30, nearly five weeks into Putin's invasion, soldiers sharing the same cellphone make seven back-to-back calls in just 15 minutes. Each of the fighters shares one last piece of news.</p> <p>In Russia, Mr. Putin recast the failed campaign as an effort not to take Kyiv, but to weaken Ukrainian troops. As quickly as they came, the Russian soldiers in northern Kyiv withdrew, regrouped and pivoted east, where Russian-backed separatists have been waging war for over eight years.</p> <p>On April 1, Ukrainian law enforcement agencies and journalists entered the liberated territories of the Kyiv region for the first time since early March. The grim reality of Russia's occupation — relayed privately between soldiers and their families — now became visible to the world.</p>
Return to Top	<i>Click on source link to read translated transcripts of the intercepted phone calls</i>

HEADLINE	09/28 Russia proxies in Ukraine push annexation
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/28/world/europe/ukraine-referendum-russia-war.html
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — In a display of pageantry intended to give Moscow's land grab a veneer of legitimacy, Russian proxy officials in occupied areas of Ukraine appealed to President Vladimir V. Putin on Wednesday to annex the regions.</p> <p>The annexation requests had an air of order and formality at odds with the chaos Russia's leaders are facing both on the battlefield, where they continue to suffer losses, and at home, where tens of thousands of Russians are fleeing the country to avoid a military draft.</p> <p>The requests from the Russian proxies followed sham referendums that ended on Tuesday in four regions in Ukraine and that, to no one's surprise, purported to put voters' stamp of approval on joining Russia. Many of the ballots were cast at the point of a gun, witnesses said.</p> <p>One resident of the town of Berislav, in the Kherson region, scoffed at the notion of wanting to join Russia.</p> <p>"When they first came to our town, they beat me up and took both of my cars," the man, Pavlo, said of Russian soldiers. "And now they threatened that if I don't vote they will evict me and my family from our apartment."</p> <p>Because of the threats, said Pavlo — who insisted that his surname not be made public for fear of retaliation — he voted in support of joining Russia.</p> <p>The annexation push occurred as the European Union moved to impose new sanctions aimed at punishing Russia over its latest actions. The draft measures include an oil price cap, trade restrictions and blacklisting several individuals responsible for the referendums.</p> <p>"Last week, Russia escalated the invasion of Ukraine to a whole new level," said Ursula von der Leyen, the bloc's top official. "We're determined to make the Kremlin pay for this further escalation."</p>

On Feb. 24, Russian forces rolled across the border and began laying waste to Ukrainian cities. But when it comes to annexation, Russian officials appear to want at least a patina of legality — even as most of the world condemns the referendums as patently unlawful.

Under Russia's 1993 Constitution, Moscow cannot annex areas of a neighboring country without consent. And so the moves taking place are meant to check boxes under Russian law governing how to claim land in a neighboring country.

As a practical matter, much of the territory Russia is moving to claim is not under its control, and the Ukrainian military is whittling away even more.

On Wednesday, Ukraine continued to reclaim more towns and villages in the east while pounding Russian positions in the south. Destroyed Russian tanks and the bodies of Russian soldiers littered the roadside outside the village of Oskil as Ukrainian soldiers pushed toward the strategically important city of Lyman.

The destruction illustrated the challenges thinly spread and badly battered Russian forces are facing as they try to defend against multiple Ukrainian offensives. Russia's heavy losses led Mr. Putin to take the politically risky step of ordering the nation's first mass mobilization since World War II.

But at least 200,000 Russians have left the country since Mr. Putin announced the partial military mobilization, according to figures provided by Russia's neighbors.

Amid the setbacks on the battlefield, the Russian proxy officials in Ukraine, with the ostensible results of the referendums in hand, moved quickly to have Moscow incorporate the territories into Russia.

In two of the four provinces where voting was staged, Donetsk and Luhansk in the east, Moscow had established client states eight years ago. It was the leaders of those entities, whose legitimacy is not recognized by much of the world, who made the annexation requests.

Denis Pushilin, the leader of the Donetsk People's Republic, said he would leave for Moscow with a document signed by members of an electoral commission showing results for use in the annexation process, according to Tass, the Russian news agency.

The leader of the Luhansk People's Republic, Leonid Pasechnik, was also reported to be on his way to Moscow, and he posted a video online asking Mr. Putin to accept what he called the election results.

In the other two, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson in the south, puppet leaders declared independence from Ukraine in what they said was a first step toward being absorbed into Russia.

In Kherson, Volodymyr Saldo, the leader put in office by the occupying Russian Army last spring, appealed to Mr. Putin on Telegram, the messaging application, to accept the region as part of Russia.

If Russia follows the template laid down when it annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014, the Kremlin is expected to portray the local leaders installed by Russia's military as independent representatives of Ukrainians there, and a choreographed process would follow.

The aim this time appears to be to declare parts of Ukraine as Russian territory and then assert that the Ukrainian Army is attacking Russia. Annexation would also provide a pretext for drafting Ukrainian men in occupied areas and forcing them to fight other Ukrainians.

By Wednesday evening, the process had advanced, Tass reported. The Russian-installed leaders of Donetsk and Luhansk had sent Mr. Putin formal requests to merge with Russia, the news agency said.

Mr. Putin could at any stage pause the process, possibly to open prospects for negotiation with the threat of annexation clearly on the table. If he does not, a next step would be submitting the appeals from the

Russian proxy leaders for approval by both chambers of the Russian Parliament. There would be few surprises: Both houses consist entirely of members loyal to Mr. Putin.

So far, Mr. Putin has been coy about his plans. His spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, said the Russian leader traveled from the Black Sea resort of Sochi to Moscow on Wednesday but planned no public comment on the referendums.

Ukraine and its Western allies have dismissed Moscow's moves as political theater and said they remained determined to drive Russian forces back over the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine.

"None of Russia's criminal actions will change anything for Ukraine," President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine said in an address to the nation.

European officials also treated the Russian-orchestrated votes to annex parts of Ukraine with scorn.

"The E.U. does not and will never recognize these illegal 'referenda' and their falsified outcome, nor any decision taken on the basis of this outcome, and urges all members of the United Nations to do the same," the bloc said in a statement Wednesday.

In the two weeks since Ukraine drove Russia from towns and cities across the northeast Kharkiv region, its forces have steadily advanced farther south, breaking through the Russian defensive lines on the Oskil River.

Ukrainian units are making "slow advances on at least two axes east from the line of the Oskil and Seversky Donets River," the British military intelligence agency said on Wednesday.

But even in retreat, Russian forces continued to unleash a furious barrage of artillery and missiles in towns and cities recently freed from occupation in the Kharkiv region.

A Russian cruise missile slammed into residential and commercial buildings in the city of Pervomaysk late Monday, killing eight, including a 15-year-old girl, according to Ukrainian officials.

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HEADLINE	09/29 Draft pushes mass exodus from Russia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/09/29/world/russia-ukraine-war-news?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article#russia-draft-putin
GIST	<p>At least 200,000 Russians have left the country in the week since President Vladimir V. Putin announced a partial military mobilization after a series of setbacks in the country's war with Ukraine, according to figures provided by Russia's neighbors.</p> <p>The mobilization could pull as many as 300,000 civilians into military service, from what Russian officials have said is a pool of some 25 million draft-eligible adults on their rolls, suggesting that the departures, though unusual, may not prevent the Kremlin from achieving its conscription goals.</p> <p>Video posted on social media platforms showed long lines of cars approaching border checkpoints in countries including Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Georgia and Finland. The rapid outflow, as well as a series of protests in different parts of the country, are a stark display of discontent with Mr. Putin's policy.</p> <p>"I left because of my disagreement with the current government in Russia," said Alexander Oleinikov, 29, a bus driver from Moscow who had crossed overland into northeastern Georgia. He said that many people he knew were against the war, which he called a "tragedy" caused by "one crazy dictator."</p> <p>The size of the exodus is difficult to determine, however, given that Russia has borders with 14 countries, stretching from China and North Korea to the Baltic States, and not all governments release regular data about migration.</p>

The government of Kazakhstan said on Tuesday that 98,000 Russians had entered the country in the last week and Georgia's interior minister said more than 53,000 people had [crossed into the country](#) from Russia since Sept. 21, when the mobilization was announced. The daily number climbed over those days to around 10,000 from a normal level of about 5,000 to 6,000.

The European Union's border agency, Frontex, said in a [statement](#) that nearly 66,000 Russian citizens entered the bloc in the week to Sunday, up 30 percent from the previous week.

Those numbers give some additional credence to the scale of exodus described in a report over the weekend by the independent Latvian-based Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta Europe, which cited what it said was a security service estimate, provided by an unnamed source, [of 261,000 men having left the country](#) by Sunday.

There is also evidence that Russia may be moving to stem the flow of departures. On Wednesday, Russia's North Ossetia republic imposed restrictions on cars arriving from other parts of the country. The republic's governor, Sergei Menyaylo, said the ban was being introduced after 20,000 people crossed the border in two days.

Some European countries have already imposed border restrictions with Russia, including Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, which have closed their doors to most Russian citizens. On Wednesday, the Finnish Government said it would adopt measures the following day to "significantly restrict" Russian travel to and through Finland, a popular entry point into other Schengen countries.

On Wednesday, the United States Embassy in Moscow, which had previously urged its citizens to leave Russia, restated the position in the light of the mobilization drive, warning that those with dual Russian and American nationality could be at risk of being drafted.

Russia is also attempting to clamp down on citizens trying to leave the country. On Tuesday, the state news media reported that men waiting to flee at the Georgia border were being [served call-up papers](#). Some analysts, however, cautioned that the practical impact of the departures was likely to be limited.

"Many young Russian men are departing in a mass exodus from Russia," said Mick Ryan, an Australian [military expert](#) who has commented extensively on the war in Ukraine. "But millions of others will not have the means to leave Russia to escape their draft notices."

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HEADLINE	09/28 Sabotaged pipelines mystery: who did it?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/28/world/europe/pipeline-sabotage-mystery-russia.html
GIST	<p>BERLIN — Two days after a pair of explosions under the Baltic Sea apparently ruptured giant natural gas pipelines from Russia to Germany, the consensus hardened on Wednesday that it had been an act of sabotage, as the European Union and several European governments labeled it an attack and demanded an investigation.</p> <p>Experts said it could take months to assess and repair the damage to the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines, which have been used as leverage in the West's confrontation with Moscow over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. News of a possible attack on the lines heightened already intense fears of painful energy shortages in Europe over the winter.</p> <p>But the central mystery remains: Who did it?</p> <p>"All available information indicates those leaks are the result of a deliberate act," the European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell Fontelles, said in a statement on Wednesday. "We will support any investigation aimed at getting full clarity on what happened and why."</p> <p>Jake Sullivan, President Biden's national security adviser, called the episode "apparent sabotage."</p>

But [with little evidence to go on](#) — American officials said that explosive gas pouring from the broken pipes made it too dangerous to get close to the breach — the United States and most of its European allies stopped short of publicly naming any suspects. Still, some officials speculated about the many ways that Russia might gain, even though the pipeline carries its gas.

Poland and Ukraine openly blamed Russia, which pointed a finger at the United States, and both Moscow and Washington issued indignant denials. U.S. officials and outside experts also speculated over whether Ukraine or one of the Baltic states, which have long opposed the pipelines, might have had an interest in seeing them disabled — and in sending a message.

As the war began, Germany blocked the just-completed Nord Stream 2 from going into service, and Russia later shut off the flow through Nord Stream 1, setting off a frantic effort in Europe to secure enough fuel to heat homes, generate electricity and power businesses.

Some European and American officials cautioned on Wednesday that it would be premature to conclude that Russia was behind the apparent attacks on the Nord Streams, each of which is actually two pipelines. President Vladimir V. Putin likes to show he has his finger on the gas valve, they noted, but wielding that power could mean keeping the pipelines, whose main owner is Russia's state-controlled energy company, Gazprom, in good working order.

But others noted that one of two Nord Stream 2 pipelines was undamaged, leaving Mr. Putin the possibility of using it as leverage if the winter turns particularly cold.

Many Western officials and analysts said sabotage would fit neatly into Mr. Putin's broader Russian strategy of waging war on multiple fronts, using economic and political tools, as well as arms, to undermine Ukraine's allies and weaken their resolve and unity. It demonstrates to an already jittery Europe how vulnerable its vital infrastructure is, including other pipelines and undersea power and telecommunications cables.

"This is classic hybrid warfare," said Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, head of the defense committee in Germany's Parliament, who stressed that for now she had no evidence Russia was behind the attack but believed it was the most "plausible" culprit.

"Putin is going to use every hybrid measure at his disposal to fluster Europeans, from food to refugees to energy," she said.

Dmitri S. Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, said that accusing Russia was "predictably stupid and absurd." He said American natural gas suppliers were reaping "huge profits" from increased sales to Europe, suggesting that the United States was to blame.

"Of course we were not," said Adrienne Watson, the spokeswoman for the White House's National Security Council, in a rare on-the-record denial. "We all know Russia has a long history of spreading disinformation and is doing it again here."

Russian news outlets picked up on the Kremlin's allegation, playing clips of Mr. Biden's vow on Feb. 7 that if Russian invaded, "then there will be no longer Nord Stream 2. We will bring an end to it." U.S. officials said he meant diplomatic and economic action, and noted that Mr. Biden had been proved correct when Germany halted the project.

A former Polish foreign minister, Radek Sikorski, a vociferous critic of Moscow, appeared to support its interpretation of events with a tweet saying, "Thank you, USA" above a photo of a patch of the Baltic Sea being churned by rising methane bubbles.

Reached by telephone on Wednesday, Mr. Sikorski declined to get into specifics about his post, but noted that the Nord Stream projects had bypassed Poland, which has tense relations with Moscow,

while deepening Western Europe's dependence on Russia. "Successive Polish governments have been ripping their veins out to stop Nordstream," he said.

"Why shouldn't I be overjoyed?" he added. "I would prefer to think it was rather our allies than our enemies."

The pipelines were damaged at a critical moment in the seven-month war. Kyiv is making unexpected advances in the battlefield, Moscow has challenged Ukraine's western backers with thinly veiled threats of nuclear retaliation, Russia seems on the verge of annexing large parts of Ukraine, and Mr. Putin's order to draft hundreds of thousands of men into the military is meeting broad resistance.

At first glance, it seems counterintuitive that the Kremlin would damage its own multibillion-dollar assets. But there is value for Moscow in fueling European fear, which pushes up prices in the gas market.

And in the short term, analysts say, it is not clear what Mr. Putin stands to lose, having already largely cut off gas deliveries to European countries in recent months.

With both Nord Streams already idle, the damage in the Baltic Sea has no immediate effect on European energy supplies. Some officials said that it might not be a coincidence that a gas conduit from Norway to Poland known as the Baltic Pipe opened on Tuesday. It was conceived to ease Warsaw's dependence on Russia and passes close to the area where the leaks occurred.

In recent months, Europe has cut its gas consumption, found alternative suppliers and built up its stock, though at a steep price.

"The bad news — from the Kremlin's perspective — is that weaponization of gas supply is not working as a political strategy," said Pavel Molchanov, an energy analyst at Raymond James, a U.S. investment bank. "Through its own actions, Gazprom lost nearly all of its market share in Europe."

On Wednesday, swirling streams of gas continued to escape the three ruptured pipes, roiling the sea surface near the Danish island of Bornholm. The Danish authorities said they had begun a criminal investigation to determine the exact cause of the leaks. The U.S. government offered its assistance.

While some European officials were quick to speculate about Russian involvement, American officials were more cautious, noting the lack of available evidence.

For all their harsh critiques of Mr. Putin and his government, U.S. officials noted that it had been tempting to blame just about every attack on Russia, sometimes wrongly. In July, there was a widespread assumption in Washington that a major cyberattack on Albania was a Russian effort to undermine a NATO ally; this month, officials said an investigation had concluded the culprit was Iran.

Several officials in Washington noted that nongovernmental actors could have committed the pipeline sabotage. Others said the two detonations registered by seismometers in the region pointed to explosives placed by a submersible or dropped by aircraft or boat, suggesting a state had been involved.

"It's hard to assess; does anybody benefit?" Finland's president, Sauli Niinistö, told the news outlet Helsingin Sanomat. "That is why this is a mystery so far."

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HEADLINE	09/29 Pentagon: \$1.1B long-term aid to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/09/29/world/russia-ukraine-war-news#the-latest-us-military-package-for-ukraine-calls-for-1-1-billion-in-long-term-aid

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon said on Wednesday it would send an additional \$1.1 billion in long-term military aid to Ukraine, including 18 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System launchers, or HIMARS, one of the most vaunted weapons of the seven-month war with Russia.

But unlike the 16 HIMARS the military rushed to Ukraine from its existing stockpiles over the summer, these new weapons will be ordered from the manufacturer, Lockheed Martin, and will take “a few years” to deliver, a senior Defense Department official told reporters.

Shifting the source of Ukrainian military supplies from the Pentagon’s own stockpile, which is large but not limitless, to items newly manufactured by the defense industry indicates that the White House and military leaders are transitioning to a sustainable model Kyiv can depend on for an open-ended war with Russia.

Privately, American commanders have also voiced concern that if the United States sends more HIMARS vehicles immediately, the Ukrainians will burn through the rocket ammunition provided by the Pentagon too quickly, potentially jeopardizing American military readiness in coming months.

The promise of new military aid comes at a critical time in the war, when Ukraine has the momentum on the battlefield, and has retaken vast stretches of land in the east and is pressing entrenched Russian forces in the south.

The Russian president, Vladimir V. Putin, is mobilizing up to 300,000 reservists in an attempt to shore up his forces, and Ukrainian commanders are pushing to try to take back as much territory as they can before the winter freeze forces both sides to slow their operations and dig in. The HIMARS systems have proven effective at cutting Russian supply lines, destroying ammunition depots, bridges, rail links, and troop concentrations far beyond the lines.

Asked why the Pentagon didn’t just send more of the advanced rocket launchers from its own inventories — as President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine has repeatedly requested — the senior Defense Department official sidestepped the question, saying the future delivery was to ensure Ukraine “will have what it needs for the long haul to deter future threats.”

Pentagon officials have said for weeks that with the American HIMARS and 10 similar rocket systems already delivered to the battlefield — 26 rocket-launchers in all — Ukraine has enough of the weapons to attack the Russian targets it wants. Indeed, the satellite-guided rockets fired by HIMARS have struck more than 400 Russian ammunition depots, command posts and radars.

The new shipment announced on Wednesday also includes 150 Humvees, 150 vehicles for towing artillery, radars, counter-drone systems and body armor, which the senior Pentagon official said would be delivered from manufacturers in the next six to 24 months. That brings to \$16.2 billion in total military aid that the United States has committed to Ukraine since the war started in February.

The \$1.1 billion in new equipment will be paid for by the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, a congressionally approved fund that allows Ukrainian leaders to purchase military goods directly from the defense industry.

At the same virtual briefing for reporters on Wednesday, a senior U.S. military official said the first “small group” of Russians from the 300,000 conscripts ordered mobilized had arrived in Ukraine. The official did not provide details on how many new conscripts had been sent to the battlefield or where they were located.

But the official, who like the senior Pentagon official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss operational matters, expressed skepticism that the Kremlin could properly mobilize, train and equip anywhere near that total number of new troops.

“Just the mechanics of outfitting that size of a force is very difficult,” the senior U.S. military official said.

HEADLINE	09/28 Civil trial Portland cops use of force begins
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/1st-civil-trial-over-portland-cops-use-of-force-begins/
GIST	<p>PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The first civil suit alleging Portland police used excessive violence against a 2020 racial justice demonstrator opened Tuesday before a jury in Multnomah County Circuit Court.</p> <p>Civil rights attorneys are paying close attention because the outcome could answer questions about the potential liability the city faces over similar cases, Oregon Public Broadcasting reported.</p> <p>The killing of George Floyd, a Black man, by Minneapolis police officers in late May 2020, sparked protests as part of a worldwide reckoning over racial injustice. In Portland, racial justice protesters clashed nightly with police and federal law enforcement from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Marshals Service.</p> <p>One such protester, Erin Wenzel, claims she was following police instructions on Aug. 14, 2020, when an officer “ran at her and violently slammed into her with a nightstick.”</p> <p>According to her lawsuit, the force of the impact lifted her off the ground and she landed on her face. Wenzel says in her suit that she stood up and tried to keep walking but another officer struck her and a third knocked her down.</p> <p>Wenzel broke her arm and suffered injuries to her wrist, face and torso, her lawsuits says. Wenzel’s complaint alleges the city’s failure to discipline Rapid Response Team officers it knew to be violent encouraged officers to continue violence against protesters.</p> <p>Wenzel is asking for damages totaling \$500,000. The trial is expected to run through Oct. 3.</p> <p>In their response to the complaint, an attorney for the city of Portland, William Manlove, said protesters — including Wenzel were wearing protective equipment including gas masks and helmets.</p> <p>In court filings, attorneys for the city say police were trying to stop protesters from reaching the headquarters of the Portland Police Association, the city’s police union, where break-ins and fire damage had happened during previous demonstrations. The police declared an unlawful assembly and used a loudspeaker to order the crowd to disperse.</p> <p>The city does not say Wenzel threw anything at officers or broke any laws. But it does argue that any physical contact the police made “was justified and privileged as it was reasonable and necessary to carry out those employees’ law enforcement duties.”</p> <p>From May 29 through Nov. 15 last year, during the height of the social justice protests in Portland, the city’s police used force more than 6,000 times, according to a U.S. Department of Justice report.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 CDC: monkeypox vaccine appears effective
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/vaccine-appears-to-protect-against-monkeypox-cdc-says/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — At-risk people who received a single dose of the monkeypox vaccine in U.S. efforts against the virus appeared to be significantly less likely to get sick, public health officials announced Wednesday, even as they urged a second dose for full protection.</p> <p>It was the first look public health officials have offered into how the Jynneos vaccine is affecting monkeypox, a virus that is primarily spread among men who have sex with infected men.</p> <p>“These new data provide us with a level of cautious optimism that the vaccine is working as intended,” Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said Wednesday.</p>

Roughly 800,000 first and second doses of the vaccine have been administered across the country to people who are considered high risk for becoming infected with the virus, White House National Monkeypox Response Coordinator Bob Fenton said.

There is no scientifically conclusive data available to prove effectiveness of the Jynneos vaccine against monkeypox.

But the CDC's new real-world figures show that unvaccinated men, between the ages 18 and 49 who were considered eligible for the vaccine, were 14 times as likely to become infected with monkeypox as those who had one dose at least two weeks earlier. The data came from 32 states for cases between July 31 through Sept. 3.

Still, Walensky said, lab studies show the highest level of immunity from the virus is reached after people get a second dose of the vaccine, calling it "really important."

The U.S. leads the world in monkeypox cases. So far more than 25,000 infections of the virus, which can cause rash, fever, body aches and chills, have been reported.

The country suffered from early problems in its response, with U.S. officials struggling to distribute the vaccine after the first case was detected in May. As some cities and counties tried to stretch the limited supply this summer they stopped offering the recommended second dose of the shot.

Now, public health officials are trying to catch up, reminding people to get their second dose. About 150,000 second doses had been administered as of Sept. 17, according to CDC.

"We're really asking providers to do outreach to get people their second doses," Walensky said.

Public health officials also announced changes Wednesday to who is eligible for the vaccine and how they can get it.

The new CDC guidance is intended to reach more people who might be at risk for monkeypox exposure. The guidance makes gay, bisexual men and transgender people who have had more than one sexual partner in the past six months eligible for the vaccine. It also allows the vaccine to be administered on the shoulder or upper back so marks from the shot can be covered with clothing.

The number of new monkeypox cases has declined in recent weeks, but there are signs of worsening racial disparities, with Black people making up roughly 47 percent of new cases reported the week of Sept. 11.

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HEADLINE	09/28 Record methane leak damaged pipelines
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/official-gas-leaks-around-1-3-of-denmarks-co2-emissions/
GIST	<p>COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Methane leaking from the damaged Nord Stream pipelines is likely to be the biggest burst of the potent greenhouse gas on record, by far.</p> <p>The Nord Stream pipeline leaks that were pumping huge volumes of methane into the Baltic Sea and atmosphere could discharge as much as five times as much of the potent greenhouse gas as was released by the Aliso Canyon disaster, the largest known terrestrial release of methane in U.S. history. It is also the equivalent of one third of Denmark's total annual greenhouse gas emissions, a Danish official warned Wednesday.</p> <p>"Whoever ordered this should be prosecuted for war crimes and go to jail," said Rob Jackson, a Stanford University climate scientist. Two scientists looked at the official worst case scenario estimates provided by the Danish government — 778 million cubic meters of gas — for The Associated Press. Jackson and David Hastings, a retired chemical oceanographer in Gainesville, Florida each calculated that would be an</p>

equivalent of roughly half a million metric tons of methane. The Aliso Canyon disaster released 90-100,000 metric tons.

Andrew Baxter, a chemical engineer who formerly worked in the offshore oil and gas industry, and is now at the environmental group EDF thought the Danish estimate was likely too high. He had a more conservative estimate. But it was still more than double the Aliso Canyon disaster.

“That’s one thing that is consistent with these estimates,” he said, “It’s catastrophic for the climate.”

Kristoffer Böttzauw, head of the Danish Energy Agency, said emissions from the three leaks on the underwater Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines correspond to approximately 32% of annual Danish carbon dioxide emissions. Danish emissions in 2020 were approximately 45 million tonnes of CO2.

Sabotage was suspected to have caused the leaks, and seismologists said Tuesday that explosions rattled the Baltic Sea before they were discovered. Some European officials and energy experts have said Russia is likely to blame since it directly benefits from higher energy prices and economic anxiety across Europe. But others cautioned against pointing fingers until investigators are able to determine what happened.

Methane seen bubbling at the ocean surface was an indication of “a strong upward flow,” according to Paul Balcombe, a member of the engineering faculty at the department of chemical engineering at Imperial College London.

The loss of pressure in the pipe likely meant a large amount of gas was already lost, he said. The impacts of the gas leak are still coming into focus, Balcombe said, but are likely to be significant.

“It would have a very large environmental and climate impact indeed, even if it released a fraction of this,” he said.

Methane is a major contributor to climate change, responsible for a significant share of the climate disruption people are already experiencing. That is because it is 82.5 times more potent than carbon dioxide at absorbing the sun’s heat and warming the Earth.

Böttzauw, told a press conference that the agency expects the gas to be out of the pipes, that run from Russia to Germany, by Sunday.

“We believe that half the gas is out by now of one of the two pipes,” Böttzauw said. “We are talking about a huge spill of several million cubic meters of gas.”

The Danish agency statement added that its calculation was based on information from operators Nord Stream AG and Nord Stream 2 AG about the content of natural gas in the three pipelines that are leaking.

The incidents come as the EU struggles to keep a lid on soaring gas and electricity prices.

“As long as there is gas, it dangerous to be there,” Böttzauw said, declining to say when experts would be able to go down and see the pipes, which he said was made of 12-centimeter (5-inch) thick steel coated with concrete. They lie on the seabed between 70 and 90 meters (230 feet and 295 feet) deep.

The leaks all were in international waters. Two were within the Danish exclusive economic zone while the third is in the Swedish equivalent.

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HEADLINE	09/28 Oil spills from offshore transportation down
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/new-report-oil-spills-from-offshore-transportation-way-down/

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Oil and natural gas spills from tankers and pipelines in U.S. waters dropped dramatically from the last decade of the 1990s to the one from 2010 through 2019, according to a federal report Wednesday.

The amounts spilled and dumped in wastewater from drilling rigs and production platforms rose, but — if the disastrous 2010 Gulf of Mexico spill isn't counted — the increase is mainly because there is more work offshore, said the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

"It is evident that regulatory changes, advances in science and technology, and (for the most part) attention to safety would have helped to make North American waters less polluted with oil" without the Deepwater Horizon spill, the report said.

But the BP well blew, killing 11 people and spewing millions of gallons (kiloliters) of oil into the Gulf of Mexico off Louisiana over months. Another big contributor during the past decade was the nation's longest-running oil spill, also off Louisiana.

The 497-page report was written by an international committee of academic and industry experts and reviewed by many others.

"Overall, I think they have done a very comprehensive job," said Anthony Knap, director of the Geochemical and Environmental Research Group at Texas A&M University, who was not an author or reviewer.

Like a report released in 2003, this one — "Oil in the Sea IV: Inputs, Fates, and Effects" — said that oil in runoff, largely from cars and cities, is the biggest source of ocean oil pollution, with natural seeps second and spills in third place.

But hard data on oil in rivers is so scarce and the range of possible amounts so huge that — although the report put the figure from the U.S. about 20 times the earlier estimate — it couldn't say whether there was an actual increase.

Increases in urban land area, population and vehicle ownership make an increase "plausible ... but it is unclear by how much," the report said.

"One of the big findings is in general we do not have adequate data," report committee chair Kirsi K. Tikka, of Ardmore Shipping and Pacific Basin Shipping, said in a phone interview Tuesday from London.

Natural seeps of oil and natural gas from the ocean floor were estimated at nearly 30.8 million gallons (116,500 kiloliters) a year. That's about 60% of the 1990s estimate, but the change is because recent estimates of seeps in the Gulf of Mexico and off California are more accurate, Tikka said.

"We have more techniques to measure the seeps," but those two areas are the only ones with data, she said.

The spill data is the most accurate part of the report, Tikka said. "As you probably know, even on large oil spills you never have exact numbers," she added, "but those are the best we have available."

Spills from tanker ships fell from an average of 1.6 million gallons (6,175 kiloliters) a year in the last decade of the 1900s to 61,600 gallons (230 kiloliters) in the decade just past. Over the same period, pipeline spills went from nearly 585,000 gallons (2,210 kiloliters) a year to just under 117,000 gallons (440 kiloliters).

Laws and regulations after the Exxon Valdez ran aground in 1989 near its namesake Alaska town account for much of the difference in tanker spills, Tikka said.

	<p>Among other things, she noted, the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 phased in a requirement for double-hulled tankers in U.S. waters, and other countries and international bodies followed suit.</p> <p>Increased inspection and maintenance accounts for the reduction in pipeline spills, she said.</p> <p>Spills from offshore oil drilling and production rose sevenfold over the period, to about 338,600 gallons (1,280 kiloliters) a year. And oil in well wastewater was estimated at about 2 million gallons (7,900 kiloliters) a year — about 2.5 times the estimate for the 1990s.</p> <p>The wastewater oil is likely an overestimate, Tikka said. Oil companies report the total amount of “produced water,” but not the amount of oil it held, so the report used the highest allowable percentage. “Most likely the levels are less,” she said, adding that both figures reflect increased drilling and production.</p> <p>Without Deepwater Horizon, Tikka said in an email, “spillage per unit of production has decreased by 65% since the last ... report, but remained relatively constant in the last 20 years.”</p> <p>Texas A&M’s Knap said in an email, “Just like discharges from ships, operators are far more diligent than they were in the past so a straight line from number of platforms to more oil is not a given.”</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 State Auditor: police deadly force audits
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/washington-unveils-use-of-deadly-force-investigation-auditing-process/281-13e71e12-0784-4dab-be9b-a975216b940d
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — Washington has announced that it will be taking a closer look at investigations into the use of deadly force by law enforcement.</p> <p>The State’s Auditor’s Office (SAO) will run audits into investigations going back to January 2020, comparing them against rules and best practices established by the state Criminal Justice Training Commission.</p> <p>State Auditor Pat McCarthy says this will provide Washingtonians more access to understand how the process works.</p> <p>“We want to increase trust in government, that’s a goal of ours,” she said. “I think everyone wants the system to work, and they want to see that it’s working, and we provide that outside, independent, objective set of eyes to do that.”</p> <p>Two audits have already been completed, one involving Sean Howell, who died on May 15, 2020, after being forcibly restrained while in custody at the Kitsap County Jail, and the other that involved David J. Pruitte, who was killed by a Kitsap County deputy on August 4, 2020.</p> <p>The county prosecutor declined to pursue criminal charges in both cases.</p> <p>McCarthy says the audits don’t determine if the officers were justified in using deadly force, but she hopes agencies will take the SAO’s advice on how to improve.</p> <p>“We look at the facts as they are presented to us, and we opine on that if you will,” McCarthy said. “There are best practices out there, and we’re encouraging them to follow those rules and procedures if they need to.”</p> <p>The audits are available to the public and can be found on the State Auditor’s Office website. The office has also created a page that explains how deadly force investigation audits are conducted.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Seattle libraries authorizes staff use Narcan
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/seattle-public-libraries-authorizes-staff-administer-narcan-overdoses/QVRHKLW2ZFBUZMAJZKEYUWFM5M/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Seattle Public Libraries is planning to allow trained staff members to administer Narcan for those who overdose on library grounds.</p> <p>The drug, also known by the generic name naloxone, is used to counteract opioid drug overdoses quickly.</p> <p>Staff will not be required to administer Narcan to library visitors who appear to be overdosing on opioids. Instead, they will only be trained to administer the drug on a volunteer basis.</p> <p>“We want our staff to be prepared for any kind of situation,” Elisa Murray with Seattle Public Library said.</p> <p>As a result, Narcan may not be available at library locations that have no staff volunteers to administer it.</p> <p>“In other words, there is no guarantee that a patron who overdoses on library grounds will receive naloxone,” The Seattle Public Library said in its shelf talk blog.</p> <p>The drug is not yet available at libraries. It has been ordered and will be put in first aid kits for staff use only.</p> <p>Training sessions for staff who are interested in volunteering are being secured.</p> <p>“We expect these steps to be completed in the next few months,” the library said in its blog.</p> <p>“We have a very compassionate staff and they do see people in need. And I know that we will be happy to offer this when we can,” Murray said.</p> <p>Calling 911 will still be the first step for a library staff member who finds a visitor who appears to have overdosed.</p> <p>Brad Finegood is a strategic advisor of behavioral Health for Public Health Seattle/King County. He believes there should be Narcan available everywhere in case of an overdose.</p> <p>He tells KIRO7 he lost his brother to a drug overdose and believes Narcan would have saved him.</p> <p>“But could they have given my brother back? Could they have given my parents their son back? Could they have given my kids their uncle back? Absolutely,” Finegood said.</p> <p>Finegood believes having more Narcan available will help save lives.</p> <p>“We can all band together to really come together to help people. And to me, that’s truly inspirational,” Finegood said.</p> <p>As for library officials, they reviewed the issue over the last several months with guidance on liability from the Seattle City Attorney’s Office and an examination of other city department practices.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/29 Hurricane Ian moves inland, weakens
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/hurricane-ian-continues-batter-florida-weakened-category-1-storm-rcna49924
GIST	<p>Hurricane Ian had weakened to a Category 1 late Wednesday, but the powerful storm that caused life-threatening storm surges, floods that stranded people in their homes and knocked out power to more than 2 million was not over, officials warned.</p>

Ian had maximum sustained winds of about 75 mph early Thursday and was moving slowly through central Florida on its way to the western Atlantic, according to the National Hurricane Center.

At 2 a.m., Ian was around 55 miles southwest of Cape Canaveral and moving northeast at 9 mph, the hurricane center said.

Ian made landfall near Cayo Costa around 3 p.m. Wednesday as a powerful Category 4 hurricane with 150 mph winds, forecasters said.

The storm is believed to be one of the strongest hurricanes ever recorded making landfall in Florida.

Around 2 million customers in Florida were without power early Thursday after Ian struck the state's western coast, causing a path of destruction as it moved toward the Atlantic Ocean.

Lee County Manager Roger Desjarlais said Wednesday evening the damage is extensive in the county, which includes Cayo Costa, Fort Myers and Cape Coral. The full scope of the impact was not known as the storm and winds still raged.

Rescue crews were forced to wait for conditions to improve before going to the aid of people stranded by high water.

In Lee County, there were also reports of vehicles "floating out into the ocean," but Sheriff Carmine Marceno said officials were not able to investigate or respond to calls of people trapped until winds dropped below 45 mph.

"Those that are in need: We want to get to you, and we will get to you as soon as possible," he said in a video address shortly before 8 p.m.

Terry Mazany hunkered down on the 22nd floor of a Fort Myers high-rise with his wife and 91-year-old mother as the water rose and winds whipped the building.

"We are trapped. There is 8 feet of water around us," Mazany, who moved to Florida from California a year ago, [told MSNBC](#). He noted that the elevators were also shut down.

"It started relatively manageable but the last 12 hours we have dealt with that freight train of 100-plus mile an hour winds shaking the building, swaying," he said.

Though Ian was expected to continue to weaken, the hurricane center cautioned that it could be near hurricane strength when it moved over Florida's east coast Thursday.

Central and northeast Florida could get 20 inches of rain, and life-threatening storm surge remained a risk for parts of Florida's western and eastern coasts, the hurricane center said.

Florida's Atlantic coast from northeast of Orlando into Georgia could see storm surge of 6 feet, it said. Radar indicated that 4 to 5 inches of rain per hour was falling in the hurricane's heavier bands Wednesday, said Jamie Rhome, acting director of the National Hurricane Center.

"Those are incredibly heavy rainfall rates," Rhome said Wednesday night on MSNBC. The storm's slow speed was prolonging the damaging wind but also increasing the potential for flooding, he said.

Tracking website poweroutage.us put the number of Florida customers without electricity at almost 2.3 million early Thursday.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said the intensity of the storm will be historic.

	<p>“At a minimum, it’s going to be a very strong Category 4 that’s going to rank as one of the top five hurricanes to ever hit the Florida peninsula,” he said.</p> <p>The hurricane is forecast move across central Florida and be over the Atlantic Ocean later Thursday. But it then will likely turn north and approach the northeastern Florida, Georgia and South Carolina coasts Friday, according to the hurricane center.</p> <p>The governors of Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina have declared states of emergency ahead of the storm’s arrival.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Puerto Rico still struggles 5yrs after Maria
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/puerto-rico-electric-grid-hurricane-maria-fiona/
GIST	<p>A day before the five-year anniversary of Hurricane Maria's landfall, Puerto Rico was pummeled again by another storm, Fiona, a Category 1 hurricane that shut down the island's electric grid, leaving residents in the dark for days. In 2017, Maria and Irma took down all of the island's transmission lines and damaged the grid, resulting in the longest blackout in U.S. history, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office.</p> <p>Hurricane Fiona made landfall on Sept. 18 and knocked out the still-unstable electric system, an unwelcome reminder to residents that even after the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) obligated \$9.5 billion to rebuild the grid after Hurricanes Maria and Irma, the work is far from finished.</p> <p>The vast majority of that money, which was approved in September 2020, has not yet been spent. The office in Puerto Rico overseeing reconstruction of the grid said in mid-September that the island has received \$1.5 billion in disbursements that were approved under emergency appropriations after Hurricane Maria.</p> <p>"The funds that we have were appropriated for Puerto Rico to improve the grid — ... I don't think anything has happened. We seem to have many more power outages after Maria," said one expert, Agustin Carbo, the senior manager on energy transition at the Environmental Defense Fund.</p> <p>Manuel Laboy, the executive director of COR3, the office in charge of managing the federal funds for the recovery efforts of Hurricane Maria and the 2020 earthquakes, oversaw the efforts to rebuild Puerto Rico's grid from 2017-2020 and said the process was very slow, hampered by bureaucracy and multiple restrictions imposed by the federal government.</p> <p>"The funds became available for the electric grid reconstruction and permanent work in September 2020," Laboy told CBS News.</p> <p>The Trump administration also delayed other congressionally appropriated funds to be used for the recovery efforts overall — including \$1.9 billion for the electrical grid — after Hurricane Maria for about two years, a report from the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Office of Inspector General noted.</p> <p>The reasons ranged from the 2018-2019 government shutdown to a bureaucratic disagreement between HUD and the Office of Management and Budget, the complexity of the funding process, the island's existing financial hurdles and a new FEMA disaster relief system that raised yet more obstacles.</p> <p>"We have the perfect storm," says University of Puerto Rico economist José Caraballo-Cueto.</p> <p>"FEMA from the very beginning, back in 2017 gave poor service to Puerto Rico," said Caraballo-Cueto. "There have been some improvements but not enough... The local government has also given poor service."</p>

And beyond the bureaucratic snafus, the U.S. Commission of Civil Rights published a report saying that during Hurricanes Irma and Maria, FEMA's recovery efforts showed discrimination against Puerto Ricans — especially those with disabilities and non-native English speakers — in distributing assistance.

FEMA lacked enough Spanish-speaking employees to help islanders obtain aid, and the commission found that this meant that "Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans received disproportionately lower amounts of assistance for María recovery than English-speaking mainland Americans."

The agency is trying to address this. As Fiona was about to hit the island, FEMA announced it was sending hundreds of personnel to help residents through the aftermath, and it now has a Spanish-language site to help with recovery efforts.

The agency has made efforts to speed up the work needed to repair and update the electrical grid.

In 2020, a new system called the FEMA Accelerated Awards Strategy (FAASt) was implemented specifically to "expedite energy grid work in Puerto Rico." Under the program, critical infrastructure projects could be grouped together in order to streamline the approval process, and FEMA and the Puerto Rico Electric Grid Authority agreed to use statistical sampling to come up with cost estimates for projects.

"The goal was to expeditiously obligate all permanent work funding for subrecipients providing critical services to survivors," Laboy said.

After construction projects were approved by FEMA officials, they had to undergo review by Puerto Rico's Energy Bureau (PREB) — an independent agency that oversees and regulates work related to the island's electric grid. According to FEMA, PREB issued its first project approvals in June 2021.

A FEMA spokesperson said that before FAASt was implemented, "this endeavor would normally require inspections and agreements for each individual project, which would take years to complete."

Once approved and reviewed by all parties, the project can officially start, and PREPA can ask for reimbursement for project work, Laboy says.

This is the point where FAASt has run into problems, largely as a result of the island's bankruptcy process.

Puerto Rico filed for bankruptcy in 2016 with over \$70 billion in debt from the central government. The island also has over \$50 billion in pension obligations.

The central government's debt was restructured early this year, but bondholders and the local government haven't yet reached a deal on Puerto Rico's Electric Power Authority's (PREPA) \$9 billion debt.

Section 428 of FEMA's Stafford Act says that any permanent project under the Public Assistance program that exceeds \$123,100 will have to be done through reimbursement, that is, "they need to spend the money first," Laboy said.

The local government or agency that's part of the rebuilding process needs to pay for the project — and then apply for reimbursement. But the liquidity the power authority has can't be used because it's in the middle of the bankruptcy process and negotiations over its debt.

According to Laboy, there is an amendment to the Stafford Act that allows Puerto Rico to receive a 20% advance payment on project costs.

But amid the island's economic depression, some experts say this won't be enough, given the poor condition of the grid.

"This amendment resolves part of the problem but not all of it," Caraballo-Cueto told CBS News.

The uncertainty from the debt negotiations is "preventing PREPA from using more resources to do permanent improvement" to the grid, Caraballo-Cueto said.

Renewable energy goals

In recent years, the local energy bureau has also demanded Puerto Rico pursue renewable energy options.

The Puerto Rico Energy Public Policy Act dictates that Puerto Rico must obtain 40% of its electricity from renewable resources by 2025 — just three years from now. By 2050, electricity needs to be 100% renewable.

"We are barely at 2% or 3%" according to energy experts, who think it could take a decade of work. Now, over 300,000 residents in the island remain in the dark two weeks after the hurricane. Nonetheless, Carbó is still optimistic that the grid can be made to work for Puerto Rico.

"It's one of the worst in the U.S., but we can make it one of the best," Carbó said.

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HEADLINE	09/28 Russia draft army to Ukraine: no training
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/russian-president-vladimir-putin-accused-of-sending-newly-drafted-troops-to-ukraine-without-any-training?ref=home
GIST	<p>Men that are being conscripted into Russia's war in Ukraine during Moscow's "partial mobilization" are allegedly being sent to the front without any training in some cases.</p> <p>"Mobilized Russians are immediately taken to the front—without any preparation," human rights group Perviy Otdel warned in a Telegram post. "We were officially told there would be no training before we are sent to the war zone," one mobilized Russian said in a video shared by Perviy Otdel.</p> <p>Basic combat training for American troops, by comparison, lasts approximately ten weeks, according to the U.S. army.</p> <p>It's not clear how, or if, Russia plans to arm and equip the new influx of manpower. Russian forces are already struggling with mounting equipment losses in Ukraine, including 1,190 tanks, since the beginning of the war, according to Oryx, a Dutch open source intelligence analysis group. By the Ukrainian military's count, that number is closer to 2,312 tank losses, as well as 4,889 lost armored vehicles, 331 lost Multiple Launch Rocket Systems, and 224 lost helicopters, according to statistics shared Wednesday. Adding to that, Russia's defense industry is struggling to replace equipment losses due to sanctions.</p> <p>The quick deployment of Russian conscripts without training and adequate equipment is the latest sign of Russia's slipshod approach to the war in Ukraine. Since the outset of the war, Russian troops have been encountering troubles with their equipment, training, morale, and preparation for conflict.</p> <p>Their logistics and fueling preparation were so lacking in the early days of the war that the Russian military failed to capture Kyiv, the capital—one of Russian President Vladimir Putin's key objectives in invading Ukraine in the first place.</p> <p>Moscow announced the "partial mobilization" of 300,000 reservists last week after a series of blows to the Russian war effort in Ukraine—Ukrainian forces launched several counteroffensives in Ukraine that pushed Russian forces into retreat.</p> <p>The mounting losses have given rise to a Putin under pressure and desperate—one willing to try withstanding domestic dissent, protests against the war, and citizens' exodus of the country. But the haphazard deployment and lack of training the Kremlin has settled on for Russian conscripts will almost certainly continue the trend of failures, and could contribute to a dip in morale among Russian fighting groups, as well as casualties.</p>

Technically, the mobilization is supposed to be reserved for those with some military experience, but fears are circulating that the Russian government may slash requirements in due time.

In an attempt to evade mobilization, Russians have been fleeing the country in recent days in large flocks. The exodus has been so massive that Russian authorities in North Ossetia, near the country of Georgia, have begun [limiting car travel to Georgia](#) as of Wednesday, according to The Moscow Times. [Finland's border authorities](#) have proposed building a fence to prevent a mass-scale influx of Russians as they flee the mobilization. [Over 100,000 fled](#) to Georgia, Finland, and Kazakhstan in recent hours.

The disarray extends to the Kremlin itself. Rumors that Russian authorities will [close the border](#) to men of military age are circulating, but the Kremlin has not yet made a decision on the matter. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov suggested Tuesday that [Russian authorities can't keep track](#) of how many people have been leaving the country since the mobilization announcement. Russian authorities set up [mobile enlistment](#) stations on the Georgia border in an attempt to catch those fleeing the country, the BBC reported.

Although the war effort is flagging, [Putin still seems intent](#) on sending his country's citizens to war and trying to destroy Ukraine.

Russia is working to put up a more ["substantive" defense](#) and is working to advance near Bakhmut, according to a British intelligence brief published Wednesday. Russia's main war effort now is focused on the Donbas, according to a Tuesday U.S. Defense Department briefing.

"We continue to see, particularly in the Donbas region, the Russians' attempt to conduct offensive operations in that area, with Ukraine successfully holding the line," Pentagon Press Secretary Gen. Pat Ryder said Tuesday.

Russia is leaning on operatives from Wagner Group, a Russian mercenary organization, to fight in the Donbas, as well, Ryder said.

But Putin's threats have escalated from sending more troops to nuclear saber-rattling in recent days. The Russian president suggested last week that the West was provoking Russia in a way that might force them to [resort to nuclear weapons](#). Just Wednesday, Peskov said the Kremlin views the United States' role as getting closer and closer to being a party to the conflict.

"The U.S. side is getting involved in this conflict ever more deeply," [Peskov said](#).

As of Tuesday, the Defense Department hasn't seen any evidence from Russia that would cause the United States to "adjust" its nuclear posture.

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HEADLINE	09/28 'Catastrophic' Ian makes landfall in Florida
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/catastrophic-hurricane-ian-set-to-wallops-south-florida-on-wednesday-as-one-of-the-most-powerful-storms-ever?ref=home?ref=home
GIST	<p>Storm surge from Hurricane Ian began inundating several cities on the Southwest Florida coast on Wednesday afternoon, sweeping some homes off their foundations as it simultaneously pounded Florida with 155 mph winds.</p> <p>Winds at that speed are the equivalent of an EF3 tornado, meteorologist Matthew Cappucci reported, and are expected to span at least 50 miles as Ian—the strongest storm of the season and one of the most powerful in history—wallops Florida.</p>

While the whipping winds are a serious threat, the National Hurricane Center says that “catastrophic” storm surge of 18 feet—enough to inundate some small homes completely—could also be deadly between Sarasota and Fort Myers, where Ian made landfall just after 3 p.m.

“That is a tremendous amount of water,” Ross Giarratana, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service’s Tampa Bay office, told The Daily Beast. “Not something you want to ride this out in.”

By 2 p.m. Wednesday, videos emerged from Naples and Fort Myers Beach that showed both cities partially submerged, overcome by a [storm surge of more than 6 feet](#)—hours before high tide is expected. Videos appeared to show homes [floating in the surge](#) there.

In another video, a house in Naples had its roof [ripped off by Ian’s winds](#), which have forced local first responders to stop responding to all calls [as far north as Sarasota County](#).

[Florida Power & Light](#), which services much of Southwest Florida, reported just after 4 p.m. that more than 500,000 residences were without power, which is about a third of the population of Sarasota, Charlotte, Lee, and Collier counties. A spokesperson told [ABC 7](#) that customers should prepare for significant delays in getting power back as Ian’s strength may mean the company has to “rebuild parts of their system, not just restore power.”

To the north, in Pinellas County, [Duke Energy](#) reported 35,000 people were without power at 2 p.m.—hours before Ian is expected to deliver hurricane-level winds there.

Making things direr for those directly in Ian’s path is the suddenness of the threat.

Southwest Florida was initially forecast to avoid the worst of the tropical system for the last week. Ian was instead forecast over the weekend to strike north of Tampa Bay, followed by a forecast on Monday that had Ian striking Tampa Bay itself—90 miles north of where Ian is headed onshore Wednesday morning. But Ian’s path slowly crept east, followed by one last significant shift on Tuesday night that suddenly put the southern half of Florida’s Gulf Coast directly in harm’s way.

Perhaps because of this late shift, most of the shelters in Sarasota and Manatee counties remained empty on Wednesday morning, the [Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#) reported.

This could be a dangerous combination for the nearly 2 million people who live between Sarasota and Fort Myers. Meteorologists have likened the path and strength of Ian to that of Hurricane Charley, which [killed 35 and caused \\$25 million](#) in damages when it struck the same area in 2004.

But while Southwest Florida will suffer the brunt of Ian’s force, most of Florida will face dangerous conditions in the next 36 hours.

In Tampa Bay, the largest threat is excessive rainfall—with isolated pockets that could see 24 inches fall, while most get at least 18 inches—in a region that regularly floods with significantly less rain. Similar totals are expected in Orlando and Daytona Beach as Ian moves across the state, parallel with Interstate-4.

All of Florida, meanwhile, is at risk of tornadoes spawning in Ian’s outer rainbands, the National Weather Service said. The storm already showed what it was capable of on Tuesday night, when a tornado is suspected of flipping and demolishing small aircraft at [an airport in Broward County](#), and when the [streets of Key West were completely flooded](#) despite Ian missing to the west.

In an eerie sign of what’s to come, [pictures emerged Wednesday](#) of the bay just outside downtown Tampa—usually full of glistening blue water—gone completely barren, sucked out to sea by Ian.

The water is expected to come back with vengeance later Wednesday, however. This has kept thousands of residents in Tampa and the surrounding areas in mandatory evacuation zones, with local authorities warning that [first responders won’t be sent to save anyone](#) who chooses not to evacuate.

	<p>“All information tells us this is very serious,” said Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri on Monday. “This is the real deal. If you don't evacuate, you're on your own. No one's going to come to rescue you.”</p> <p>Florida’s gulf coast began shutting down Monday, with school districts canceling classes for the week, while the airports and grocery stores in the region closed up shop by Tuesday evening. Even the Hillsborough County Jail was evacuated on Wednesday morning, transporting 160 inmates farther inland just before Ian’s arrival.</p> <p>And Waffle House, often the last business to close and regularly the barometer of just how serious a storm is, told USA Today on Wednesday morning that it would close 21 locations in Southwest Florida.</p> <p>Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who spoke with President Joe Biden on Tuesday about the impending storm, begged residents to heed evacuation orders and treat the system as a serious threat.</p> <p>“It’s time to hunker down and prepare for this storm,” he said in a press conference Tuesday. “This one is the real deal... This storm is going to do a lot of damage, so people should be prepared for that.”</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Guidance: treating, diagnosing long Covid
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/guidance-released-diagnosing-treating-long-covid-symptoms/story?id=90628184
GIST	<p>Citing concerns about the lingering and sometimes debilitating long-term impacts of COVID-19 on the body -- and observed inequities amongst minority patients suffering disproportionately from the virus -- medical experts on “long COVID” issued the first guidance of its kind to diagnose and treat the mysterious illness.</p> <p>Experts at the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation said they hope the guidance will help other doctors leverage their experience with patients to help address and mitigate their symptoms.</p> <p>The guidance is indicative of widespread concern among medical experts that even months after resolving the initial infection, COVID is still causing serious health concerns amongst many Americans. At least 9 million long COVID patients are grappling with a range of symptoms, but experts said that number could be as high as 28 million people.</p> <p>"When we recognized that long COVID, this new problem was developing due to the pandemic, we really felt an obligation to come forth and try to address it as best as we could," Dr. Steven Flanagan, American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation president-elect said at a reporter roundtable Tuesday ahead of the guidance release. "We recognized two years ago, this is a problem."</p> <p>A priority in addressing long COVID is to "recognize, assess and treat" the symptoms across a wide range of medical disciplines, including cardiovascular and pulmonary to neurologic, cognitive and gastrointestinal care, experts said.</p> <p>Dr. Alba Azola, the lead author of the autonomic dysfunction guidance statement and member of the Johns Hopkins Post-Acute COVID-19 Team, said the medical community will need to tailor individual rehab protocols for each patient's unique needs.</p> <p>"As the pandemic has continued, more people of all ages have contracted COVID-19, and the number of children potentially impacted by long COVID has also increased," Dr. Amanda Morrow, of Kennedy Krieger Institute’s Pediatric Post-COVID-19 Rehabilitation Clinic and lead author of the pediatric statement, said at the Tuesday media briefing.</p>

The most common long COVID symptoms children experience are fatigue and attention problems, ongoing fever, headaches, sleep issues, and new mental health issues like anxiety and depression. Older, female children may be at an increased risk of developing long COVID, Morrow said.

Symptoms, management and rehabilitation for long COVID differ for children and adults, the experts said. Moreover, parsing out a long COVID diagnosis from other potential medical problems is not easy, since long COVID can involve so many of the body's systems.

"Parents, caregivers, teachers and coaches are the frontline in observing changes and children that may be related to long COVID," Morrow said.

"Children generally have fewer preexisting conditions than adults, so long COVID symptoms should be considered relative to the prior acute COVID illness," Morrow said. "Young children and children with disabilities may have difficulty describing their symptoms, so it's really important to try to tease that out during the medical interview."

ABC News asked how the new guidance will ensure marginalized communities get the attention they need. Making information about long COVID more accessible is a first step, the experts said, but it can't be the last.

"The Academy has been concerned about health equity, and we certainly want everybody to have access to the care that they need," Flanagan said. Though there is currently legislation aimed at supporting resources in underserved communities, "there is more to be done, and we are not there yet."

"This is a real significant issue," Azola said. "I think it's just the preponderance of Caucasian females in our cohorts of patients that are being treated at long COVID clinics is a reflection of the limited patient access to medical care in the United States, directly."

"We know that there are people out there, probably debilitated, suffering from long COVID symptoms, that are not even aware about long COVID, or that there's actually something that can be done to help them," Azola said.

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HEADLINE	09/28 Putin nuclear threats in Ukraine real?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/explainer-real-putins-nuclear-threats-ukraine-90651550
GIST	<p>Russian President Vladimir Putin warns that he won't hesitate to use nuclear weapons to ward off Ukraine's attempt to reclaim control of Moscow-occupied areas that the Kremlin is about to annex.</p> <p>While the West dismisses that as a scare tactic, a top Putin lieutenant upped the ante by boldly saying the U.S. and its NATO allies wouldn't dare strike Russia, even if it used nuclear weapons in Ukraine.</p> <p>A look at the nuclear threats over Ukraine:</p> <p>WHAT DROVE PUTIN TO MAKE THE THREATS?</p> <p>A Ukrainian counteroffensive forced Russian troops to retreat rapidly from broad swaths of the northeastern Kharkiv region this month and handed Moscow its most humiliating defeat since the opening weeks of the war.</p> <p>The Kremlin then speeded up its orchestrated "referendums" in occupied areas, asking if they want to come under Moscow's rule. The voting, denounced as illegal and rigged by Kyiv and the West even before it began, predictably gave Russia the result it wanted.</p> <p>Moscow says that after incorporating the regions, it will view a Ukrainian attack on them as an act of aggression and will respond accordingly.</p>

Putin raised the stakes further by mobilization of reservists for the war, aiming to call up at least 300,000. But the effort is proving widely unpopular, with tens of thousands fleeing Russia and fueling protests and violence that threaten to destabilize the country.

The mobilization won't provide a quick fix for the military, however. Running out of conventional options, Putin appears to be increasingly erratic and tempted to reach for nuclear weapons to avoid a defeat that could threaten his 22-year rule.

He has repeatedly talked about using them with a terrifying ease. He chillingly has said Moscow's enemies would die before even having time to repent their sins, and once acknowledged that nuclear war would be catastrophic, "but why would we need a world without Russia?"

WHAT'S IN THE NUCLEAR ARSENALS?

Since the Cold War era. Russia and the United States have maintained a nuclear parity, together accounting for about 90% of the world's nuclear arsenals.

According to data exchanged earlier this year under the New START arms reduction treaty between Moscow and Washington, Russia has 5,977 nuclear warheads for its strategic forces and the U.S. has 5,428. Each warhead is much more powerful than the bombs dropped by the U.S. on two Japanese cities at the end of World War II, the only time atomic weapons were used.

The New START pact limits the U.S. and Russian strategic arsenals that include the nuclear-tipped land- and submarine-based intercontinental ballistic missiles and nuclear-armed bombers.

In addition, however, Moscow and Washington have large, undisclosed numbers of what are known as tactical nuclear weapons.

These are designed for battlefield use and have a lower yield, compared with the strategic warheads designed to destroy entire cities. These tactical weapons include bombs, artillery ordnance or warheads for short-range missiles and are intended to strike a crushing blow to troops on one designated section of the front line.

WHAT ABOUT USING A TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPON?

A tactical nuclear weapon strike against Ukraine would not have catastrophic consequences on the same scale as an attack with strategic warhead.

But even a low-yield nuclear weapon used on the battlefield, aside from killing troops in the immediate vicinity, would still contaminate a broad area and expose large numbers of civilians in densely-populated Ukraine and neighboring countries to radiation risks. In fact, Russia and its ally Belarus would face the highest contamination risk because of prevailing winds.

Employing even just one low-yield nuclear weapon would also have a devastating political impact, marking the first atomic attack since August 1945. That could set the stage for a rapid escalation and perhaps lead to an all-out nuclear conflict.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan responded to Putin by saying Russia would pay a high, if unspecified, price if it used nuclear weapons against Ukraine.

IS THIS JUST BRINKMANSHIP

Putin has said his nuclear threat isn't a bluff. His top associate, Dmitry Medvedev, said Tuesday that Russia has the right to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine if Kyiv threatens Russian statehood.

Medvedev declared NATO would stand back if Moscow launched a nuclear strike on Ukraine. "American and European demagogues aren't going to die in a nuclear apocalypse, and so they will swallow the use of any weapons in the current conflict," he said.

Michael McFaul, former U.S. ambassador to Moscow, tweeted that by dangling the nuclear threat, "Putin is not bluffing, he is deterring."

"He is trying to prevent the West from providing more sophisticated weapons to Ukraine," McFaul said.

Sergei Karaganov, a Moscow political analyst who advised the Kremlin on foreign policy, said Russia "can't afford to lose in Ukraine," adding: "Our enemies should realize that they have put themselves and the entire world on hell's brink."

Karaganov hinted that Moscow could even ponder an escalatory option of striking a NATO ally.

"I'm 99% sure that if a nuclear strike is launched on one of the European countries supporting Ukraine, the U.S. won't use nuclear weapons," he said. "It would take a madman in the White House to respond to a limited use of nuclear weapons by Russia with a nuclear strike. Or a person who hates America and ready to sacrifice, say, Boston for Poznan."

The Pentagon said last week the U.S. has seen no Russian moves that would trigger any change in America's nuclear posture. Spotting such preparations could be difficult, however, even for U.S. spy planes, satellites and cyberintelligence.

Unlike the U.S., which relies on submarines armed with intercontinental ballistic missiles for a large part of its arsenal, most of Russian nuclear forces consists of land-based missiles. Some are mounted on mobile launchers that can be tracked, but many are in silos, making launch preparations more difficult to discern.

More compact battlefield nuclear weapons are even harder to track down, their small size allowing them to be deployed secretly long ahead of their possible use.

Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Wednesday that Putin's threats should be taken seriously, arguing: "It's not a sign of weakness but of political wisdom."

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HEADLINE	09/28 Iraq: rockets hit Baghdad Green Zone
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/clerics-supporters-storm-baghdads-government-zone-90623353
GIST	<p>BAGHDAD -- Four Katyusha rockets landed in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone government area Wednesday, wounding four security officers, Iraqi state news reported.</p> <p>The rockets landed as parliament voted to keep Speaker Mohammed Halbousi on the job, rejecting his resignation request. Halbousi was originally named a candidate for the post by parliamentarians backed by influential Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. Al-Sadr's 73 lawmakers resigned last June to protest the political deadlock.</p> <p>The Iraqi military said earlier in a statement that one rocket landed near parliament, another near the parliament's guesthouse, and a third at a junction near the Judicial Council. Two security officials told The Associated Press that the fourth rocket also landed near parliament. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief media.</p> <p>The U.S. has often accused Iranian-backed militia of firing rockets into the Green Zone.</p> <p>The officer of caretaker Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi in a statement said security forces were pursuing the assailants who fired the rockets, and asked protesters to remain peaceful.</p>

	<p>Earlier, supporters of al-Sadr attempted to storm Baghdad's Green Zone government area Wednesday as the Iraqi parliament held session on the resignation of its speaker.</p> <p>AP journalists saw those supporting al-Sadr waving flags as security forces gathered around them. They managed to break through a security barrier on a bridge leading to the heavily fortified zone but got no farther.</p> <p>Al-Sadr's bloc won the most votes in parliamentary elections last October but he has been unable to form a majority government. His followers stormed the parliament in late July to prevent their rivals from Iran-backed Shiite groups from forming a government.</p> <p>With ensuing rallies, clashes with security forces, counter-rallies and a sit-in outside parliament, the government formation process has stalled.</p> <p>Al-Sadr has been calling for the dissolution of parliament and early elections and has been in a power struggle with his Iran-backed rivals since the vote.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Palestinians: 4 killed, 44 injured Israel raid
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/palestinians-killed-israeli-raid-west-bank-90623751
GIST	<p>JENIN REFUGEE CAMP, West Bank -- At least four Palestinians were killed and 44 wounded during an Israeli military raid Wednesday into the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank, the Palestinian Health Ministry reported, marking the deadliest episode since Israel escalated a crackdown on the occupied territory earlier this year.</p> <p>Israeli forces said they fatally shot two Palestinians they had been sent to arrest in the camp over their suspected involvement in recent shooting attacks. When soldiers surrounded a house in the camp, a bomb exploded, a gunfight ensued and Israeli troops killed the two Palestinians, the military said. The army later released drone footage showing a large explosion that it said was detonated by militants.</p> <p>During the raid, armed clashes broke out in the camp as militants hurled rocks and opened fire at arriving troops. Two Palestinians were killed and at least 44 others were wounded, the Palestinian Health Ministry said. Amateur video showed one of the men being shot in the head as he appeared to be aiming a weapon at Israeli troops.</p> <p>Israel has been conducting nightly raids in the northern West Bank since a series of deadly Palestinian attacks in Israel last spring. Much of that activity has been focused in the Jenin area — where some of the attackers lived. Israel identified one of the Palestinians killed in Wednesday's raid as Rahman Hazam, the brother of a Palestinian gunman who carried out a deadly shooting attack in central Tel Aviv last April before he was killed by police.</p> <p>"This was the bloodiest day this year," said Jamal Huweil, a 52-year-old camp resident and official in the ruling Fatah party. "People are killed, wounded. There's destruction. Every time (Israeli forces) come into the Jenin camp, our resistance becomes stronger and stronger."</p> <p>It was chaos as Israeli troops exchanged fire with Palestinian militants on nearly every street of the crowded camp, sending bullets in all directions. Young protesters rushed to hurl stones and hand grenades at Israeli soldiers and scrambled from gunfire. Israeli armored vehicles and bulldozers rumbled down the battered roads. The clashes escalated as angry crowds of men marched through the camp's narrow alleys holding aloft the bodies, shrouded in flags of local militant groups, of the killed Palestinians.</p> <p>"We are here for martyrdom," they cried.</p>

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party identified one of the men killed in the clashes as a 24-year-old Palestinian intelligence officer named Ahmed Alawneh.

Alawneh is the second Palestinian security officer killed in a confrontation with Israeli troops this month. While U.S.-trained Palestinian security forces have long cooperated with Israel in an uneasy alliance against Islamic militants, the recent shootings of officers lay bare Palestinians' deep disillusionment with the security coordination. A cadre of young men with no outlet and little hope for the future have increasingly joined militant groups.

Jenin — long considered a bastion of Palestinian militancy and frequent flashpoint for violence — is governed by the Palestinian Authority like most other Palestinian urban centers, even though the Israeli military routinely carries out arrest raids in the area. The PA says the Israeli raids undermine its own forces, who are seen by many residents as collaborating with Israel.

Nabil Abu Rdeneh, a spokesman for Abbas, denounced the raid, saying Israel's "policy of escalation" will not deliver "legitimacy, security or stability."

Fatah called for protests and a general strike in the West Bank over what it described as a "dangerous escalation." Small groups of Palestinians threw stones at Israeli troops and burned tires at checkpoints near the major cities of Ramallah and Nablus, where the army responded with tear gas and rubber bullets. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Dozens of Palestinians have been killed in the campaign of raids on the West Bank, making this year the deadliest in the occupied territory since 2015.

U.S. State Department spokesperson Ned Price, speaking to reporters in Washington on Wednesday, called on the parties to de-escalate and return to a period of calm. "This is in the interest of all Israelis and Palestinians," he said.

Most of the Palestinians killed in the recent wave of Israeli raids have been wanted militants, as well as young men who throw stones or fire bombs at soldiers invading their towns. But some civilians, including an Al Jazeera journalist and a lawyer who inadvertently drove into a battle zone, have also been killed in the violence.

Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war and has built more than 130 settlements across the territory that are home to nearly 500,000 Jewish settlers. The Palestinians want the West Bank, home to some 3 million Palestinians, to form the main part of their future state.

The last serious peace talks broke down more than a decade ago.

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HEADLINE	09/29 Myanmar former leader convicted again
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/suu-kyi-convicted-australian-economist-years-90675678
GIST	<p>BANGKOK -- A court in military-ruled Myanmar convicted former leader Aung San Suu Kyi in another criminal case Thursday and sentenced Australian economist Sean Turnell to three years in prison for violating Myanmar's official secrets act, a legal official said.</p> <p>Suu Kyi received a three-year sentence after being convicted with Turnell under the secrets law, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to release information about the case.</p> <p>Three members of her Cabinet were also found guilty, each receiving sentences of three years.</p>

Turnell, 58, an associate professor in economics at Sydney's Macquarie University, had served as an adviser to Suu Kyi, who was detained in the capital Naypyitaw when her elected government was ousted by the army on Feb. 1, 2021.

He has been in detention for almost 20 months. It was not immediately clear if that time would be deducted from his sentence.

Family and friends expressed hope he will soon be freed and deported, as has occurred with other foreigners in Myanmar convicted of political offenses.

"It's heartbreaking for me, our daughter, Sean's 85-year-old father, and the rest of our family to hear that my husband, Professor Sean Turnell, was convicted and sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment, his wife Ha Vu, also an economist, said on her Facebook page. "Sean has been one of Myanmar's greatest supporters for over 20 years and has worked tirelessly to strengthen Myanmar's economy."

"My husband has already been in a Myanmar prison for almost 2/3 of his sentence. Please consider the contributions that he has made to Myanmar, and deport him now!"

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong's office rejected the court's ruling and called for Turnell's immediate release. Decrying that he had been "unjustly detained," her office said Australian diplomats had been denied access to the court hearing for the verdict.

"We will continue to take every opportunity to advocate strongly for Professor Turnell until he has returned to his family in Australia," it said in a statement. "Professor Turnell is internationally respected for his work to support the people of Myanmar and their economic development."

"He's a great economist, nice bloke and a great human being. His main cause in life is to reduce poverty around the world and he'd developed particular expertise in Myanmar," Tim Harcourt, a professor at the University of Technology Sydney and longtime friend, said of Turnell. "Hopefully common sense and justice can prevail and Sean can return to his wife and family in Australia soon."

Turnell was arrested five days after the military takeover by security forces at a hotel in Yangon, the country's biggest city. He had arrived back in Myanmar from Australia less than a month before that to take up a new position as a special consultant to Suu Kyi. As director of the Myanmar Development Institute, he had already lived in Naypyitaw for several years.

The day after the military's takeover, he posted on Twitter: "Safe for now but heartbroken for what all this means for the people of Myanmar. The bravest, kindest people I know. They deserve so much better."

The five co-defendants were charged on the basis of documents seized from Turnell. The exact details of their offense have not been made public, though state television said last year that Turnell had access to "secret state financial information" and had tried to flee the country.

Turnell and Suu Kyi denied the allegations when they testified in their defense at the trial in August.

Turnell was also charged with violating immigration law, but it was not immediately clear what sentence he received for that.

Myanmar's colonial-era official secrets act criminalizes the possession, collection, recording, publishing, or sharing of state information that is "directly or indirectly, useful to an enemy." The charge carries a maximum penalty of 14 years in prison.

The trial, like the others involving Suu Kyi, was held in a purpose-built prison courtroom and was closed to the media and the public. Defense lawyers were barred by a gag order from revealing details of the proceedings.

The multiple criminal cases brought against the 77-year-old Suu Kyi are widely seen as an effort to discredit her and to prevent her return to politics.

She had already been sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment after being convicted of illegally importing and possessing walkie-talkies, violating coronavirus restrictions, sedition, election fraud and five corruption charges.

Suu Kyi is still being tried on seven counts under the country's anti-corruption law, with each count punishable by up to 15 years in prison and a fine.

Defense lawyers are expected to file appeals in the secrets case in the coming days for Turnell, Suu Kyi and three former ministers: Soe Win and Kyaw Win, both former ministers for planning and finance, and Set Aung, a former deputy minister in the same ministry, the legal official said.

Australia has repeatedly demanded Turnell's release. Last year, it suspended its defense cooperation with Myanmar and began redirecting humanitarian aid because of the military takeover and Turnell's ongoing detention.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, when he visited Myanmar in January this year, asked for Turnell's release in a meeting with the leader of ruling military council. Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing replied that he "would consider it positively."

The U.N. Special Envoy on Myanmar Noeleen Heyzer said she conveyed a specific request from Australia for Turnell's release when she met with Min Aung Hlaing in August. Myanmar's government said the general replied that, should the Australian government take positive steps, "we will not need to take stern actions."

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a rights monitoring organization, 15,683 people have been detained on political charges in Myanmar since the army takeover, with 12,540 of those remaining in detention. At least 2,324 civilians have been killed by security forces in the same period, the group says, though the number is thought to be far higher.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the takeover, which led to nationwide protests that the military government quashed with deadly force, triggering armed resistance that some U.N. experts now characterize as civil war.

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HEADLINE	09/29 Sweden: 4th leak Nordic Stream pipelines
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/4th-leak-reported-nord-stream-pipelines-baltic-sea-90680467
GIST	<p>STOCKHOLM -- A fourth leak on the Nord Stream pipelines has been reported off southern Sweden, the Swedish news agency said Thursday.</p> <p>Sweden's coast guards told news agency TT that they have a vessel on the site of the leak, off Sweden. All four detected leaks are in international waters, two near Sweden and two near Denmark.</p> <p>The Nord Stream pipelines run through the Baltic to transport gas from Russia to Germany. Neither pipeline was operating, but both were filled with gas. The Danish and Swedish governments believe that the leaks off their countries were "deliberate actions."</p> <p>Before the leaks were reported, explosions were recorded. A first explosion was recorded by seismologists early Monday southeast of the Danish island of Bornholm. A second, stronger blast northeast of the island that night was equivalent to a magnitude-2.3 earthquake. Seismic stations in Denmark, Norway and Finland also registered the explosions.</p>

	<p>Some European officials and energy experts have said Russia is likely to blame for any sabotage — it directly benefits from higher energy prices and economic anxiety across Europe — although others cautioned against pointing fingers until investigators are able to determine what happened.</p> <p>Speaking Wednesday before the fourth leak was reported, Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson said it would have taken a large explosive device to cause the damage.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Fla. zoos, wildlife sanctuaries hunker down
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/animals-florida-zoos-wildlife-sanctuaries-hunkering-hurricane-ian/story?id=90635719
GIST	<p>More than 2.5 million Floridians were ordered to evacuate as Hurricane Ian barreled through the Gulf of Mexico with its sights set on the west coast of the Sunshine State.</p> <p>What happens to the residents who can't evacuate -- the animals who live in the state's many zoos and wildlife sanctuaries?</p> <p>All licensed captive wildlife owners have individualized storm preparation plans outlined in their required Critical Incident Plan, Ashlee Sklute, public information specialist for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, told ABC News. The FWC instituted additional requirements for captive wildlife owners after Hurricane Andrew in 1992 to reduce the threat of escape or injury of captive wildlife, Sklute said.</p> <p>Zookeepers and animal conservationists have been working in recent days to ensure their animal residents remain safe as the major hurricane threatens the region with Category 4 winds, torrential rain and devastating storm surge.</p> <p>For the past several days, the veterinary team at the Central Florida Zoo and Botanical Gardens in Sanford has been making sure that zookeepers have all of the adequate medications for animals. The nutrition team has been planning to make sure that the zoo has plenty of food to get the animals past the next several days and into next week, Christopher Torge, the director of animal operations there, told ABC News.</p> <p>The next step is getting the animals into secure enclosures.</p> <p>Since Florida is often in the path of strong storm systems forming in the Atlantic basin, most organizations are already equipped with enclosures that can withstand hurricane-force winds.</p> <p>"First and foremost, it all starts with infrastructure," K. Simba Wiltz, CEO of the Central Florida Animal Reserve in St. Cloud, told ABC News. "The construction of our facility is such that we have the wind ratings necessary to be able to ride out and be certain that at least the structure should be fine."</p> <p>The majority of the habitats at ZooTampa have buildings called "night houses" that are attached to them and are constructed with masonry blocks, Christopher Massaro, vice president of zoological operations, told ABC News.</p> <p>"So the majority of our animals, especially the ones that would be a little bit more, you can imagine, difficult to move ... they have those buildings attached right to their habitat so it makes it very easy to put them someplace safe during the storm," Massaro said, adding that the elephant's night house is the "safest building on campus."</p> <p>At the Carson Springs Wildlife Conservation Foundation in Gainesville, Florida, many of the animals will remain in their large outdoor enclosures, Christine Janks, president and co-founder of the foundation, told ABC News.</p>

The small foundation is on high ground, so the biggest threat there is not the flooding but the hurricane-force winds, which could down oaks and other large trees on the enclosures, Janks said, adding that the keepers try to move the animals into the most secure sections of their enclosures because of this.

Carson Springs houses about 100 animals at a time, including cheetahs, jaguars, otters, tortoises and Henry, the world's oldest male Indian rhinoceros, who is 41.5 years old and a fan favorite, Janks said.

Henry has a "nice house" and has been basking in the torrential downpours, Janks said.

"He's from India," she said. "It doesn't rain enough here for him, if that's possible."

By Wednesday morning, all of the animals at the ZooTampa were moved and prepared for the storm, Massaro said. The zoo's contingency plan for storm preparedness paves the way for every animal at the park to have a safe place to go, Massaro said.

The securing of animals fairs a bit differently for some of the smaller sanctuaries. At the Wild Florida Sanctuary in Riverview, up to 40 of the animal residents, small monkeys, lemurs, owls, and a skunk, will be riding out the storm inside the home of the sanctuary's vice president, Robyn King, she told ABC News.

Other animals, such as deer that are too fragile to move and a 400-pound pig, will have to remain outside, King said. But the keepers will make rounds to check on them during the storm, she said.

Birds tend to be the most difficult animals to secure for inclement weather, the keepers said.

At Carson Springs, the smaller birds, such as the kookaburras, were brought inside to the now-crowded animal care building -- something the chatty animals are "not happy about," Janks said.

"They don't understand it's better than what they would get outside," she said, laughing.

The free flight aviary at ZooTampa proves complicated to evacuate, Massaro said, adding that while they try their best to train the birds to come down into the holding pens, they don't always comply.

At the Central Florida Zoo and Botanical Gardens, the birds get kenneled and brought into a safe, secure building, where 11 crew members will also be riding out the storm, Torge said. There, the keepers can keep a "close eye" on them, and make them as comfortable as possible with extra food and blankets, as well as enrichment in the form of toys, Torge said, adding that the goal is to keep them as happy and safe as possible.

The big cats, however, are easier to handle due to their learned patterns, Wiltz said. They are also used to the frequent thunderstorms Florida experiences in the summer and early fall, he added.

"It's only once the real wind settles in that they will likely go into their dens and just not come out until the storm is passed," Wiltz said.

The giraffes and rhinoceroses at the Central Florida Zoo get locked into their barn with ample food and water, Torge said. Training also plays a big factor in preparedness there, so keepers are able to secure the animals into their kennels, Torge said.

"If we don't have to use nets, or anything like that, that's perfect," he said. "We prepare for this their entire lives to make sure that if we do have to do something, to move them from one area to another, that they're trained and that they're used to that."

While the keepers don't necessarily notice a change in behavior for the animals as the storm approaches, it is the animals that have to be moved that experience the most stress during storm preparations, they said.

"We've got to be taking into consideration the sensitivity of those animals that are moving to different environments in the zoo, and those would be the ones that would be a little bit more concerned about," Massaro said.

All of the animals at the Chase Sanctuary and Wildlife Conservancy in Webster require coaxing to get into their enclosures, Nina Vassallo, the sanctuary's founder, told ABC News. Sometimes, keepers are forced to catch the animals with a net, she added.

Generators are also an important factor when preparing for a storm.

While the animals were already situated, Janks' husband was still working Wednesday afternoon to make sure all the generators are in place to make sure that the thousands of pounds of frozen meat they have stored in outdoor freezers do not spoil in the likely event that they lose power.

"They are OK for a day or two," Janks said. "But if there's an extended power outage, I'd have a lot of really smelly chicken on my hands."

At the Chase Sanctuary and Wildlife Conservancy in Webster, the keepers have emphasized the need for working generators as well, as they expect to lose power, Vassallo said.

More than 1 million customers in the state were without power as of Wednesday afternoon.

Much of the population at Carson Springs fasts for one or two days a week -- something they would also do in the wild, Janks said. Their keepers are planning to have them fast on Thursday, when central Florida will experience the worst of the hurricane, she said.

Not only would the animals likely not come out to eat during the height of the storm, but the directive was also made to keep the zookeepers safe as well, Janks added.

At Central Florida Animal Reserve, most of the residents -- primarily big cats -- received a "special" early morning feed so they are feeling "quite healthy and happy at the moment," Wiltz said.

Keepers at the Chase Sanctuary have been working for the past 48 hours to prepare for the storm -- boarding up the last of their residents -- mostly primates, many critically endangered -- on Wednesday afternoon, Vassallo said. The animals' hurricane enclosures include doors that the keepers will be able to pass food and water through, Vassallo said.

"They'll stay in there indoors now probably for the next 24 to 36 hours," Vassallo said, adding that the sanctuary also houses antelope, tortoises, sloths and big birds. "We put them up with a lot of food."

Now that all of the preparations have been made, all that's left to do is hunker down and wait for the storm to pass. None of the facilities saw any escapees during storm preparations, the keepers said.

"We have got the residents in the best possible position that they can be in now, making sure that all of the staff and the support scenes are also going to be in the best possible position," Wiltz said.

Once the storm passes and it is safe to travel again, the facilities are anticipating a massive cleanup, including debris and tree branches that may have flown away amid the heavy winds.

The facilities also coordinate with emergency services and members of the community throughout the emergency and cleanup efforts, Wiltz said.

"We'll begin recovery efforts as soon as it's safe," Wiltz said.

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SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/hidden-epidemic-schools-parents-police-scramble-us-fentanyl/story?id=90574780
GIST	<p>Twenty-year-old Charlie told "Nightline" that he's lucky to be alive after he nearly became one of the thousands of people across the country who lost their lives to fentanyl.</p> <p>The Southern California college student, who asked not to reveal his real name, was at a party in August when he thought he was taking a party drug, but it turned out to be the synthetic opioid. A friend was able to get help and quickly administered Narcan, a medicine used to reverse the effects of an opioid overdose, saving his life.</p> <p>"Thank God that I was surrounded with the people that were there. Thank God my friends were there and thank God that I have smart friends," Charlie told "Nightline."</p> <p>Charlie's story is becoming all too common in America as parents, school officials and parents are scrambling to get ahead of the epidemic and prevent more deaths.</p> <p>The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said fentanyl was the leading cause of the record number of drug poisonings and overdose deaths in the country last year. More than 71,000 overdose deaths were linked to synthetic opioids like fentanyl, according to the CDC.</p> <p>Local, state and federal law enforcement agencies have been on high alert, not only monitoring calls of overdoses but also stopping the flow of the drug into communities.</p> <p>On Tuesday, the Department of Justice and U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency announced it seized an estimated 10 million fentanyl-laced pills and 82 pounds of fentanyl powder motor crews across all 50 states.</p> <p>"That is enough to kill 36 million Americans," Attorney General Merrick Garland told reporters Tuesday.</p> <p>Anne Milgram, U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency Administrator, told reporters Tuesday that two Mexican cartels, the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (JNGC), "are responsible for virtually all of the fentanyl and they currently dominate the worldwide fentanyl distribution and supply chain."</p> <p>Another hurdle for authorities is brightly colored "rainbow fentanyl" pills that are the same as regular fentanyl but that could be mistaken for look like candy. They have been seized in at least 20 states since February, according to federal investigators.</p> <p>Milgram added that agents are seeing fentanyl-laced pills disguised as regular drugs like OxyContin and Percocet.</p> <p>Laura Brinker and Matt White, of San Diego, told "Nightline" that their 17-year-old son Connor White died last year from fentanyl poisoning when he thought he was taking Percocet.</p> <p>"It was not a dozen pills in a bag. It was one pill...that was taken," Brinker told "Nightline."</p> <p>Brinker and her husband called for more awareness and education about the crisis.</p> <p>"There's got to be other means and other ways that we're educating our children and in a very, very serious way, not just don't do drugs," she said.</p> <p>Alberto Carvalho, the superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, told "Nightline" that the crisis is getting worse in his schools.</p> <p>"I cannot quantify it but I can tell it's much bigger, much more disturbing than what's reported," he said of the fentanyl crisis in Los Angeles schools.</p>

Two weeks, ago 15-year-old Melanie Ramos was found dead on the floor of the girls bathroom after school hours from a fentanyl overdose. A 15-year-old boy, who is being investigated for allegedly selling her synthetic opioid, was arrested in connection with her death.

Days after Ramos' death, Carvalho announced that Narcan would be available at all K through 12 schools, and nurses and other staff will be trained on administering the drug.

"It's a sad new reality but consider the alternative. I think the presence of Narcan in our schools is a life-saving necessity at this point," he said.

In addition to the schools, non-profit groups have been hard at work spreading education on the dangers of fentanyl and providing tools to help prevent overdoses.

Madeline Hilliard, the founder of Team Awareness Combating Overdose (TACO), said her organization is also providing free test strips that can indicate if a drug is fentanyl in disguise. She said while there is some perception that the strips encourage more drug use, they save lives.

"What we see is when people use fentanyl test strips...they're now aware that fentanyl is a risk," Hilliard told "Nightline."

Charlie, who is helping TACO with their awareness, said he too is urging young people to be cautious.

"It's inevitable that college students are going to come across these drugs. "It's just becoming more and more integrated into drugs across the country," he said.

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Cyber, Tech Awareness

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HEADLINE	09/29 Europe braces; mobile network blackouts
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/exclusive-europe-braces-mobile-network-blackouts-sources-2022-09-29/
GIST	<p>PARIS/STOCKHOLM/MILAN, Sept 29 (Reuters) - Once unthinkable, mobile phones could go dark around Europe this winter if power cuts or energy rationing knocks out parts of the mobile networks across the region.</p> <p>Russia's decision to halt gas supplies via Europe's key supply route in the wake of the Ukraine conflict has increased the chances of power shortages. In France, the situation is made worse by several nuclear power plants shutting down for maintenance.</p> <p>Telecoms industry officials say they fear a severe winter will put Europe's telecoms infrastructure to the test, forcing companies and governments to try to mitigate the impact.</p> <p>Currently there are not enough back-up systems in many European countries to handle widespread power cuts, four telecoms executives said, raising the prospect of mobile phone outages.</p> <p>European Union countries, including France, Sweden and Germany, are trying to ensure communications can continue even if power cuts end up exhausting back-up batteries installed on the thousands of cellular antennas spread across their territory.</p> <p>Europe has nearly half a million telecom towers and most of them have battery backups that last around 30 minutes to run the mobile antennas.</p> <p>FRANCE</p>

In France, a plan put forward by electricity distributor Enedis, includes potential power cuts of up to two hours in a worst case scenario, two sources familiar with the matter said.

The general black-outs would affect only parts of the country on a rotating basis. Essential services such as hospitals, police and government will not be impacted, the sources said.

The French government, telecoms operators and Enedis, a unit of state-controlled utility EDF (EDF.PA), have held talks on the issue over the summer, the French government and the sources said.

The French Federation of Telecoms (FFT), a lobby group representing Orange (ORAN.PA), Bouygues Telecom (BOUY.PA) and Altice's SFR, put the spotlight on Enedis for being unable to exempt antennas from the power cuts.

Enedis declined to comment on the content of the talks held with the government on the matter.

Enedis said in a statement to Reuters all regular customers were treated on an equal footing in the event of exceptional outages.

It said it was able to isolate sections of the network to supply priority customers, such as hospitals, key industrial installations and the military and that it was up to local authorities to add telecoms operators infrastructure to the list of priority customers.

"Maybe we'll improve our knowledge on the matter by this winter, but it's not easy to isolate a mobile antenna (from the rest of the network)," said a French finance ministry official with knowledge of the talks.

A French finance ministry spokesperson declined to comment on the talks with Enedis, the telecoms groups and the government.

SWEDEN, GERMANY & ITALY

Telcos in Sweden and Germany have also raised concerns over potential electricity shortages with their governments, several sources familiar with the matter said.

Swedish telecom regulator PTS is working with telecom operators and other government agencies to find solutions, it said. That includes talks about what will happen if electricity is rationed.

PTS is financing the purchase of transportable fuel stations and mobile base stations that connect to mobile phones to handle longer power outages, a PTS spokesperson said.

The Italian telecoms lobby told Reuters it wants the mobile network to be excluded from any power cut or energy saving stoppage and will raise this with Italy's new government.

The power outages increase the probability of electronic components failing if subjected to abrupt interruptions, telecoms lobby chief Massimo Sarmini said in an interview.

TRAFFIC FLOW

Telecom gear makers Nokia (NOKIA.HE) and Ericsson (ERICb.ST) are working with mobile operators to mitigate the impact of a power shortage, three sources familiar with the matter said.

Both companies declined to comment.

The European telecom operators must review their networks to reduce extra power usage and modernise their equipment by using more power efficient radio designs, the four telecom executives said.

To save power, telecom companies are using software to optimise traffic flow, make towers "sleep" when not in use and switch off different spectrum bands, the sources familiar with the matter said.

	<p>The telecom operators are also working with national governments to check if plans are in place to maintain critical services.</p> <p>In Germany, Deutsche Telekom has 33,000 mobile radio sites (towers) and its mobile emergency power systems can only support a small number of them at the same time, a company spokesperson said.</p> <p>Deutsche Telekom (DTEGn.DE) will use mobile emergency power systems which mainly rely on diesel in the event of prolonged power failures, it said.</p> <p>France has about 62,000 mobile towers, and the industry will not be able to equip all antennas with new batteries, the FFT's president Liza Bellulo said.</p> <p>Accustomed to uninterrupted power supply for decades, European countries usually do not have generators backing up power for longer durations.</p> <p>"We are a bit spoiled maybe in large parts of Europe where electricity is pretty stable and good," a telecom industry executive said. "The investments in the energy storage area have maybe been less than in some other countries."</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Russia attacks 'not had intended impact'
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/russia-waging-most-sustained-and-intensive-cyber-campaign-on-record-ncsc-ceo-says/
GIST	<p>Russia's physical invasion of Ukraine has been accompanied by "probably the most sustained and intensive cyber campaign on record" according to one of the United Kingdom's most senior cybersecurity officials.</p> <p>Lindy Cameron, the chief executive of the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), told the Chatham House security and defence conference on Wednesday that her agency had "not been surprised by the volume of Russian offensive cyber operations, nor have we been surprised by their targeting."</p> <p>Even before NCSC was founded in 2016, its parent organization GCHQ had spent decades studying Russian cyber doctrine and tracking the threat it poses, a period during which Russia "invested significantly" in its offensive cyber capabilities.</p> <p>"This has given us a deep understanding of the Russian threat in cyberspace, both by state and non-state actors," explained Cameron.</p> <p>These state actors in Russia, which include units that are part of its intelligence apparatus and part of its military forces, "have been busy launching a huge number of attacks in support of immediate military objectives," she said.</p> <p>Despite some of the more extreme warnings from people on the fringes of the cybersecurity sector, those attacks weren't apocalyptic — nor were they intended to be. Russian attacks persistently attempted to reduce the Ukrainian government's ability to communicate with its population, to interrupt the financial system and spread panic, and to distract Ukraine's cybersecurity resources from their other priorities.</p> <p>These operations have varied in sophistication, from DDoS attacks to the Viasat attack launched an hour before Russia's tanks and missiles started targeting Ukrainian cities. The goal was to "disable or downgrade the Ukrainian government's ability to communicate," explained Cameron, "a visible example of Russian doctrine in action: using cyber operations as a tool in support of wider military objectives."</p>

	<p>“But for me, in many ways the most important lesson to take from the invasion is not around the Russian attacks — which have been very significant and, in many cases, very sophisticated. It is around Russia’s lack of success,” she added.</p> <p>“Try as they might, Russian cyber attacks simply have not had the intended impact.”</p> <p>She credited Ukraine’s own cyber defenses — which have developed through almost a decade of attacks, stretching back to Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 — alongside private sector and international partnerships.</p> <p>“If the Ukrainian cyber defense teaches us a wider lesson – for military theory and beyond – it is that in cybersecurity, the defender has significant agency. In many ways you can choose how vulnerable you can be to attacks,” said Cameron.</p> <p>This lesson was key, she warned, because although the world has yet to see significant offensive cyber activity from Russia that wasn’t directly targeting Ukraine, this could change.</p> <p>“In response to significant battlefield set-backs, in the last week we have seen Putin react in unpredictable ways... There is still a real possibility that Russia could change its approach in the cyber domain and take more risks — which could cause more significant impacts in the UK.”</p>
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HEADLINE	09/29 Hackers aid protests against Iran govt.
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/09/hackers-aid-protests-against-iranian.html
GIST	<p>Several hacktivist groups are using Telegram and other tools to aid anti-government protests in Iran to bypass regime censorship restrictions amid ongoing unrest in the country following the death of Mahsa Amini in custody.</p> <p>"Key activities are data leaking and selling, including officials' phone numbers and emails, and maps of sensitive locations," Israeli cybersecurity firm Check Point said in a new report.</p> <p>The company said it has also witnessed sharing of proxies and open VPN servers to get around censorship and reports on the internet status in the country, with one group helping the anti-government demonstrators access social media sites.</p> <p>Chief among them is a Telegram channel called Official Atlas Intelligence Group (AIG) that's primarily focused on publishing data associated with government officials as well as maps of prominent locations.</p> <p>Calling itself the "CyberArmy," the group is said to have commenced its operations in May and has also advertised a wide range of services in the past, such as data leaks, DDoS attacks, and remote access to organizations. It's also known to voluntarily hunt and dox pedophiles.</p> <p>According to Cyberint, the cyber mercenary actor also claims to have "connections with people in several law enforcement entities in Europe who can deliver sensitive information about certain individuals exclusively."</p> <p>A second group of interest is ARVIN, which consists of about 5,000 members and shares news reports about the ongoing protests along with providing a list of Open VPN servers to circumvent internet blockades.</p> <p>RedBlue™, a 4,000-member group on Telegram, has also pitched in with similar efforts, in addition to sharing hacking conversations and guides.</p> <p>Privacy-focused messaging app Signal, for its part, has reached out to its community to set up a proxy that will help people in the country use the service on Android.</p>

HEADLINE	09/28 Flagged: 13M malicious domains a month
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/malware/akamai-finds-13-million-malicious-newly-observed-domains-a-month
GIST	<p>Akamai researchers on Wednesday reported that based on a newly observed domain (NOD) dataset, they have flagged almost 79 million domains as malicious in the first half of 2022.</p> <p>The researchers say this equals approximately 13 million malicious domains per month, representing 20.1% of all the NODs that successfully resolved.</p> <p>In a blog post, the Akamai researchers explained that whenever a domain name is queried for the first time in the last 60 days, the researchers consider it an NOD. The NOD dataset lets the researchers zoom in on the “long tail” of DNS queries. This dataset is where to find freshly registered domain names, typos, and domains that are only very rarely queried on a global scale.</p> <p>NOD data lets Akamai classify a new domain very early in the threat lifecycle. All of its NOD-based detection systems and rules are fully automated. The researchers say that once a new NOD gets identified, the time needed for Akamai to classify it as malicious is measured in minutes — not hours or days. All of this gets done with no human intervention, which lets Akamai mitigate the new DNS threats quickly, according to the researchers.</p> <p>“To put these numbers into context, every month we intercept 13 million domains that are created with malicious purposes that resolve or go somewhere,” said Stijn Tilborghs, a senior data scientist at Akamai. “Based on the data that we see, and with our current heuristic detection system, this equates to 1 in 5 new domains being created for malicious purposes. From a defense perspective, Akamai was able to flag these domains as malicious because of this NOD-based detection system. This allows carriers and ISP’s to block these domains.”</p> <p>Matthew Fulmer, manager of cyber intelligence engineering at Deep Instinct, said the data shows a trend that has been increasing exponentially over the past few years: domains are created with the intent of spreading or being used in malicious activities. Fulmer said these activities are often leveraged as a part of code telling a machine where to pull a malicious payload from, developed into a phishing site with the intent of stealing credentials, or even used as a contact point for a command-and-control beacon to report back around connectivity.</p> <p>“These numbers are extremely significant, as looking at the domains in question are random number-letter combinations which amounts to almost a ‘burner’ domain,” Fulmer said. “They are created with the intent of malicious activity, and once they are compromised or classified as malicious, threat actors can just dump them and move to a new domain. For this reason alone, you need to ensure that you have adequate layering in place for your defenses, especially as the rate of false positives was 0.00042% (329 sites out of 79 million).”</p> <p>Muralidharan Palanisamy, chief solutions officer at AppViewX, said Akamai’s detection is based on NODs, which are essentially new DNS domains that appear on the internet. Palanisamy said with existing domains having some history and reputation, identifying whether or not they are secure requires minimal effort. That being said, Palanisamy said there’s a challenge in figuring out whether the new domains are malicious or not.</p> <p>“Akamai’s NOD-based automated detection is a novel approach, where they address and mitigate threats in the DNS layer, way before the connection gets established to impact applications,” Palanisamy said. “Because security is multi-faceted, we have to rely on all weapons in our arsenal to identify the bad actors. Another related approach is Google’s Certificate transparency initiative, which was able to identify and address compromised certificates, domains and certificate authorities. However, with regulatory authorities being compromised and state actors setting up their own regulations, bad actors are able to</p>

	<p>bypass checks. This is where NODs will help in identifying the new domains that pop up by monitoring and tracking them.”</p> <p>Mike Parkin, senior technical engineer at Vulcan Cyber, he’s not surprised that Akamai found so many throwaway malicious domains. Parkin said threat actors are constantly having to create new ones as the old ones are identified and either eliminated from the DNS system or blocked by security gateways.</p> <p>“Ultimately, some form of secure and validated DNS system should become the standard, though there are already a number of tools that will at least provide warnings when a user tries to connect to a suspect domain,” Parkin said.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Cyber warfare rife in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/cyber-warfare-rife-ukraine-impact-stays-shadows
GIST	<p>Hackings, network sabotage and other cyber warfare campaigns are being intensely deployed by both sides as Russia's invasion of Ukraine grinds on, though the covert operations have not proved decisive on the battlefield -- at least so far.</p> <p>Western allies initially feared a tsunami of cyberattacks against Ukraine's military command and critical infrastructure, hindering its ability to resist the Russian forces pouring across its borders.</p> <p>As of mid-September, the Cyber Peace Institute, an NGO based in Switzerland, counted nearly 450 attacks -- roughly 12 a week -- carried out by 57 different entities on either side since the invasion was launched in February.</p> <p>Yet with European and US help, Kyiv has largely withstood the high-tech onslaught.</p> <p>"Large-scale cyberattacks have indeed occurred, but it's generally agreed that they have clearly failed to produce the 'shock and awe' effect some predicted," according to Alexis Rapin, a researcher at the University of Quebec.</p> <p>Writing for the strategic studies site Le Rubicon, he said the most devastating attacks often take months or even years to plan and execute, "making it very difficult to synchronise them with a conventional military campaign."</p> <p>Another factor may be the massive help Ukraine has had from its allies, including software and expertise to protect its systems as well as counterattacks that may be hampering Moscow's cyber strategy.</p> <p>"Russia has been under constant cyber assault over the last few months from an international coalition of volunteer, non-governmental hacking organisations, the most prominent being the 'Anonymous' movement," said Arnault Barichella, a researcher at the Jacques Delors Institute in Paris.</p> <p>While it remains unclear how effective these "spontaneous" attacks have been, "Russia simply underestimated Ukraine's cyber resilience, in the same way that it underestimated the country's armed forces," he wrote in a recent report.</p> <p>- Hybrid war -</p> <p>Nonetheless, the war on Europe's eastern flank offers on-the-ground proof that cyber assaults will be part and parcel of 21st century armed conflicts.</p> <p>Even before the first Russian tank rolled into Ukraine, hackers in mid-January launched the WhisperGate malware against around 70 Ukrainian government sites, followed by a distributed denial of service (DDoS) campaign that disrupted banks, radio stations and websites.</p>

Moscow was then suspected of being behind the [Hermetic Wiper virus](#) that knocked out some 300 IT systems in Ukraine, while [hackers targeted the Viasat satellite](#) operator to deactivate thousands of internet modems.

"Most people did not hear about the fact that almost every Russian attack came with a cyberattack before and during operations -- cyber usually does not kill people," said Eviatar Matania of the Israel National Cyber Bureau.

And in most cases, IT networks that come under attack can often be restored in a few days if not hours, limiting their use when hostilities have escalated to open warfare.

More likely, cyber campaigns will be ongoing between rival states, aiming to destabilise and demotivate as opposed to seeking a knockout blow on the battlefield.

"Currently cyber is more important in peacetime than in conventional war -- in cyber we are all the time in conflict," Matania told AFP.

Rapin agrees that cyber warfare is most suited to sabotage, espionage and information wars aimed at sapping morale -- the sort of clandestine warfare waged before any shots are fired.

The tactics appear essential, however, when laying the groundwork for conventional military campaigns in which even just a few hours of having a communications or electricity network offline could offer a decisive advantage for ground and air forces.

"Cyber operations aren't some magical dust that gets sprinkled on at the end of an operation," said Colin Clarke, director of research at the Soufan Center security think-tank.

"They are woven into, or closely integrated, with the full suite of US military capabilities and security cooperation activities," not least pre-battlefield planning, he told AFP.

But the impacts of cyber assaults are often not revealed until months or years after they are deployed.

It took nearly two years before the public learned about the Stuxnet computer virus that allegedly destroyed around 1,000 of Iran's nuclear centrifuges, used to refine uranium for use in atomic weapons -- widely thought to be the result of a US and Israeli campaign.

And if Russian President Vladimir Putin determines that his Ukraine invasion is faltering, the retaliation in the cyber domain could prove more potent than seen up to now.

"You cannot underestimate the danger of a cyber escalation, especially if the Russian military operations on the ground flounder and the Kremlin feels as if its back is against the wall," Barichella said.

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HEADLINE	09/29 Malware volume down, encrypted up
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/malware-volume-down-encrypted/
GIST	<p>Overall malware detections from the peaks seen in the first half of 2021 have decreased in the second quarter of 2022, but there was an increase in encrypted malware and threats targeting Chrome and Microsoft Office.</p> <p>The figures come from a report published by WatchGuard earlier today and shared with <i>Infosecurity Magazine</i>.</p> <p>"While overall malware attacks in Q2 fell off from the all-time highs seen in previous quarters, over 81% of detections came via TLS encrypted connections, continuing a worrisome upward trend," said Corey</p>

Nachreiner, chief security officer at WatchGuard. "This could reflect threat actors shifting their tactics to rely on more elusive malware."

According to the report, the quarter's top threat was the [Follina Office vulnerability](#) (tracked CVE-2022-30190), which was first reported in April and patched only in late May. Campaigns exploiting Follina were later [attributed to state actors](#) by Proofpoint researchers.

Three other Office-based exploits (CVE-2018-0802, RTF-ObfsObjDat.Gen and CVE-2017-11882) were also widely detected in Germany and Greece.

Further, the WatchGuard report suggests that despite a 20% decrease in total endpoint malware detections, [malware exploiting browsers](#) collectively increased by 23%, with Chrome seeing a 50% surge.

In terms of attacks [targeting OT infrastructures](#), WatchGuard said the top 10 signatures accounted for more than 75% of network attack detections amid increased targeting of ICS and SCADA systems.

Finally, the security report notes a resurgence of the Emotet malware, confirming [figures from an August report by Check Point Research \(CPR\)](#) and calling it "one of network security's biggest threats."

Beyond the threats mentioned above, the document includes details on additional malware and network trends from Q2 2022, alongside recommended security strategies, critical defense tips and more.

WatchGuard's latest [Internet Security Report](#) is based on anonymized Firebox Feed data from active WatchGuard Fireboxes whose owners have directly opted to share data in support of the threat lab's research efforts.

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HEADLINE	09/29 Top threat vectors: mobile, cloud, email
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/mobile-cloud-email-top-threat/
GIST	<p>Tech executives consider business email compromise (BEC), ransomware and attacks on cloud management interfaces as the threats most likely to increase from this year to the next, and singled out mobile, email and cloud as the main attack vectors for 2023, according to PwC.</p> <p>The consulting giant polled 3522 business, tech and security execs to compile its <i>2023 Global Digital Trust Insights</i> report. Over half hailed from companies with over \$1bn in revenue, and 16% from firms with \$10bn or more.</p> <p>The majority (70%) of tech and business executives have seen improvements in their cybersecurity this year, but fewer than 40% have fully mitigated emerging risks.</p> <p>Most respondents claimed progress on several fronts, notably in operational technology (OT) security (79%), ransomware defenses (77%), security by design, and increasing the efficiency of cyber resources (both 75%).</p> <p>However, less than 3% believe they have fully mitigated cyber risk related to all initiatives outlined in the report – which range from hybrid work and cloud adoption to IT-OT convergence and supply chain digitization.</p> <p>Larger organizations are significantly more likely to be affected by risks related to the software supply chain, cloud-based pathways and operational technology, the report claimed.</p> <p>The report also highlighted several serious concerns among those global organizations polled, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Just a fifth (19%) of respondents are fully confident they have taken steps to secure against the top four causes of cloud breaches

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 56% of chief operating (COO) and chief risk officers (CROs) are extremely or very concerned about their company's ability to withstand supply chain attacks • Less than half (46%) of COO/CROs have controls in place to mitigate serious cyber-related disruption • Over half (54%) of CIOs/CISOs say security staff attrition is a problem <p>Given the average size of most of the organizations polled and the wealth of resources at their disposal, such concerns may be amplified even further among their smaller counterparts.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/29 Upgraded Prilex PoS-targeting malware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/upgraded-prilex-point-of-sale-malware-bypasses-credit-card-security/
GIST	<p>Security analysts have observed three new versions of Prilex PoS-targeting malware this year, indicating that its authors and operators are back in action.</p> <p>Prilex started as ATM-focused malware in 2014 and it pivoted to PoS (point of sale) devices in 2016. While development and distribution peaked in 2020, the malware disappeared in 2021.</p> <p>Kaspersky analysts now report that Prilex has returned, and last year's operational hiatus appears to have been a break to focus on developing a more sophisticated and potent version.</p> <p>The latest installment is capable of generating EMV (Europay, MasterCard, and Visa) cryptograms, introduced in 2019 by VISA as a transaction validation system to help detect and block payment fraud.</p> <p>As detailed in the Kaspersky report, it also enables the threat actors to use EMV cryptogram (encrypted messages between the card and the reader containing transaction details) to perform 'GHOST transactions' even using credit cards protected with CHIP and PIN technology.</p> <p>"In GHOST attacks performed by the newer versions of Prilex, it requests new EMV cryptograms after capturing the transaction," to be used in fraudulent transactions, as Kaspersky explained.</p> <p>Infection process and new capabilities</p> <p>The infection begins with a spear phishing email impersonating a technician from a PoS vendor, alleging that the company needs to update its PoS software.</p> <p>Next, the fake technician visits the target's premises in person and installs a malicious upgrade on the PoS terminals.</p> <p>Alternatively, the attackers direct the victim to install the AnyDesk remote access tool on their computer and then use it to replace the PoS firmware with a laced version.</p> <p>After the infection, the operators will evaluate the machine to determine if the target is prolific enough in terms of financial transaction volumes or if it's not worth their time.</p> <p>The new Prilex version has added a backdoor for communication, a stealer for intercepting all data exchanges, and an uploader module for exfiltration.</p> <p>The backdoor supports various capabilities, such as file actions, command execution, process termination, registry modification, and screen capturing.</p> <p>Its stealer module uses hooks on multiple Windows APIs to snoop on a communication channel between the PIN pad and the PoS software and can modify transaction contents, capture card information, and request new EMV cryptograms from the card.</p>

	<p>The captured information is saved in encrypted form locally on the compromised computer and periodically uploaded to the malware's command and control (C2) server via HTTP POST requests.</p> <p>"The Prilex group has shown a high level of knowledge about credit and debit card transactions, and how software used for payment processing works," Kaspersky concluded.</p> <p>"This enables the attackers to keep updating their tools in order to find a way to circumvent the authorization policies, allowing them to perform their attacks."</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 IRS warns: massive rise SMS phishing
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/irs-warns-americans-of-massive-rise-in-sms-phishing-attacks/
GIST	<p>The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) warned Americans of an exponential rise in IRS-themed text message phishing attacks trying to steal their financial and personal information in the last few weeks.</p> <p>"So far in 2022, the IRS has identified and reported thousands of fraudulent domains tied to multiple MMS/SMS/text scams (known as smishing) targeting taxpayers," the IRS warned. "In recent months, and especially in the last few weeks, IRS-themed smishing has increased exponentially."</p> <p>Such scam texts redirect U.S. taxpayers to phishing landing pages designed to collect sensitive information using various baits (e.g., unpaid bills, bank account problems, or law enforcement actions).</p> <p>For instance, the sender of phishing text messages can be spoofed to make it appear that they're someone the targets are more likely to trust, such as U.S. government agencies like the IRS.</p> <p>Some of the most convincing and devious lures in SMS phishing are links that send the targets to pages impersonating bank sites and asking them to verify a purchase or unlock frozen credit cards.</p> <p>While some of the attackers behind these phishing campaigns focus on stealing payment details, others are not picky and will be happy to harvest any personal info they can get to use in various other scams or to sell to others.</p> <p>"This is phishing on an industrial scale so thousands of people can be at risk of receiving these scam messages," said IRS Commissioner Chuck Rettig.</p> <p>"In recent months, the IRS has reported multiple large-scale smishing campaigns that have delivered thousands – and even hundreds of thousands – of IRS-themed messages in hours or a few days, far exceeding previous levels of activity."</p> <p>The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued a similar warning in July, alerting Americans of an increasing wave of SMS phishing attacks targeting their money and personal info.</p> <p>According to the U.S. communications watchdog's Robocall Response Team, these phishing messages (or robotexts as the FCC calls them) will hit billions of phones every month.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Phishing attacks hit new record levels
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/phishing-attacks-crushed-records-last-quarter
GIST	<p>Last quarter saw a record-shattering number of observed phishing attacks, fueled in large part by attempts to target users on their mobile devices.</p>

	<p>The latest Anti-Phishing Working Group (APWG) "Phishing Activity Trends Report" for the second quarter of 2022 found 1,097,811 observed phishing attacks, the most the group has ever measured in its history.</p> <p>The financial sector remained the top target for phishing lures (27.6%), along with other bombarded sectors, including webmail and software-as-a-service providers, social media sites, and cryptocurrency.</p> <p>But much of the rise in phishing volume is due to a new threat actor focus on mobile devices, specifically vishing (voice phishing) and smishing (SMS phishing) attacks, the report noted.</p> <p>"We're seeing a huge increase in mobile phone-based fraud, with smishing and vishing collectively seeing a nearly 70% increase in volume as compared to Q1 totals," Matthew Harris, senior product manager of fraud at Opsec said in reaction to the APWG findings. "We are still seeing fraud coming in via the typical OTT apps (WhatsApp, WeChat, Facebook Messenger, etc.), but the SMS-based fraud is really the kicker here."</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Chaos malware evolves, resurfaces
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/chaos-malware-resurfaces-go-based-ddos-cryptomining-threat
GIST	<p>The powerful Chaos malware has evolved yet again, morphing into a new Go-based, multiplatform threat that bears no resemblance to its previous ransomware iteration. It's now targeting known security vulnerabilities to launch distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks and perform cryptomining.</p> <p>Researchers from Black Lotus Labs, the threat intelligence arm of Lumen Technologies, recently observed a version of Chaos written in Chinese, leveraging China-based infrastructure, and exhibiting behavior far different than the last activity seen by the ransomware-builder of the same name, they said in a blog post published Sept. 28.</p> <p>Indeed, the distinctions between earlier variants of Chaos and the 100 distinct and recent Chaos clusters that researchers observed are so different that they say it poses a brand-new threat. In fact, researchers believe the latest variant is actually the evolution of the DDoS botnet Kaiji and perhaps "distinct from the Chaos ransomware builder" previously seen in the wild, they said.</p> <p>Kaiji, discovered in 2020, originally targeted Linux-based AMD and i386 servers by leveraging SSH brute-forcing to infect new bots and then launch DDoS attacks. Chaos has evolved Kaiji's original capabilities to include modules for new architectures — including Windows — as well as adding new propagation modules through CVE exploitation and SSH key harvesting, the researchers said.</p> <p>Recent Chaos Activity</p> <p>In recent activity, Chaos successfully compromised a GitLab server and unfurled a flurry of DDoS attacks targeting the gaming, financial services and technology, and media and entertainment industries, along with DDoS-as-a-service providers and a cryptocurrency exchange.</p> <p>Chaos is now targeting not only enterprise and large organizations but also "devices and systems that aren't routinely monitored as part of an enterprise security model, such as SOHO routers and FreeBSD OS," the researchers said.</p> <p>And while the last time Chaos was spotted in the wild it was acting more as typical ransomware that entered networks with the purpose of encrypting files, the actors behind the latest variant have very different motives in mind, the researchers said.</p> <p>Its cross-platform and device functionality as well as the stealth profile of the network infrastructure behind the latest Chaos activity appears to demonstrate that the aim of the campaign is to cultivate a</p>

network of infected devices to leverage for initial access, DDoS attacks, and cryptomining, according to the researchers.

Key Differences, and One Similarity

While previous samples of Chaos were written in .NET, the latest malware is written in Go, which is rapidly becoming a [language of choice](#) for threat actors due to its cross-platform flexibility, low antivirus detection rates, and difficulty to reverse-engineer, the researchers said.

And indeed, one of the reasons that the latest version of Chaos is so powerful is because it operates across multiple platforms, including not only Windows and Linux operating systems but also ARM, Intel (i386), MIPS, and PowerPC, they said.

It also propagates in a far different way than previous versions of the malware. While researchers were unable to ascertain its initial access vector, once it takes hold of a system, the latest Chaos variants exploit known vulnerabilities in a way that shows the ability to pivot quickly, the researchers noted.

"Among the samples we analyzed were reported [CVEs for Huawei \(CVE-2017-17215\)](#) and [Zyxel \(CVE-2022-30525\)](#) personal firewalls, both of which leveraged unauthenticated remote command line injection vulnerabilities," they observed in their post. "However, the CVE file appears trivial for the actor to update, and we assess it is highly likely the actor leverages other CVEs."

Chaos has indeed gone through numerous incarnations since it first emerged in June 2021 and this latest version is not likely to be its last, the researchers said. Its first iteration, Chaos Builder 1.0-3.0, purported to be a builder for a .NET version of the Ryuk ransomware, but the researchers soon noticed it bore little resemblance to Ryuk and was actually a wiper.

The malware evolved across several versions until version four of the Chaos builder that was released in late 2021 and got a boost when a threat group named Onyx created its own ransomware. This version quickly became the most common Chaos edition directly observed in the wild, encrypting some files but maintain overwritten and destroying most of the files in its path.

Earlier this year in May, the Chaos builder [traded its wiper capabilities for encryption](#), surfacing with a rebranded binary dubbed Yashma that incorporated fully fledged ransomware capabilities.

While the most recent evolution of Chaos witnessed by Black Lotus Labs is far different, it does have one significant similarity with its predecessors — rapid growth that is unlikely to slow anytime soon, the researchers said.

The earliest certificate of the latest Chaos variant was generated on April 16; this is subsequently when researchers believe threat actors launched the new variant in the wild.

Since then, the number of Chaos self-signed certificates has shown "marked growth," more than doubling in May to 39 and then jumping to 93 for the month of August, the researchers said. As of Sept. 20, the current month has already surpassed the previous month's total with the generation of 94 Chaos certificates, they said.

Mitigating Risk Across the Board

Because Chaos is now attacking victims from the smallest home offices to the largest enterprises, researchers made specific recommendations for each type of target.

For those defending networks, they advised that network administrators stay on top of patch management for newly discovered vulnerabilities, as this is a principal way Chaos spreads.

"Use the IoCs outlined in this report to monitor for a Chaos infection, as well as connections to any suspicious infrastructure," the researchers recommended.

	<p>Consumers with small office and home office routers should follow best practices of regularly rebooting routers and installing security updates and patches, as well as leveraging properly configured and updated EDR solutions on hosts. These users also should regularly patch software by applying vendors' updates where applicable.</p> <p>Remote workers — an attack surface that has significantly increased over the last two years of the pandemic — also are at risk, and should mitigate it by changing default passwords and disabling remote root access on machines that don't require it, the researchers recommended. Such workers also should store SSH keys securely and only on devices that require them.</p> <p>For all businesses, Black Lotus Labs recommends considering the application of comprehensive secure access service edge (SASE) and DDoS mitigation protections to bolster their overall security postures and enable robust detection on network-based communications.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Cyber threats target defense contractors
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/sophisticated-cyberattack-campaign-targets-defense-contractors
GIST	<p>A cyberattack campaign, potentially bent on cyber espionage, is highlighting the increasingly sophisticated nature of cyberthreats targeting defense contractors in the US and elsewhere.</p> <p>The covert campaign, which researchers at Securonix detected and are tracking as STEEP#MAVERICK, has hit multiple weapons contractors in Europe in recent months, including potentially a supplier to the US F-35 Lightning II fighter aircraft program.</p> <p>What makes the campaign noteworthy according to the security vendor is the overall attention the attacker has paid to operations security (OpSec) and to ensuring their malware is hard to detect, difficult to remove, and challenging to analyze.</p> <p>The PowerShell-based malware stager used in the attacks have "featured an array of interesting tactics, persistence methodology, counter-forensics and layers upon layers of obfuscation to hide its code," Securonix said in a report this week.</p> <p>Uncommon Malware Capabilities</p> <p>The STEEP#MAVERICK campaign appears to have launched in late summer with attacks on two high-profile defense contractors in Europe. Like many campaigns, the attack chain began with a spear-phishing email that contained a compressed (.zip) file with a shortcut (.lnk) file to a PDF document purportedly describing company benefits. Securonix described the phishing email as being similar to one it had encountered in a campaign earlier this year involving North Korea's APT37 (aka Konni) threat group.</p> <p>When the .lnk file is executed, it triggers what Securonix described as a "rather large and robust chain of stagers," each written in PowerShell and featuring as many as eight obfuscation layers. The malware also features extensive anti-forensic and counter-debugging capabilities which include monitoring a long list of processes that could be used to look for malicious behavior. The malware is designed to disable logging and bypass Windows Defender. It uses several techniques to persist on a system, including by embedding itself in the system registry, by embedding itself as a scheduled task and by creating a startup shortcut on the system.</p> <p>A spokesperson with Securonix's Threat Research Team says the number and variety of anti-analysis and anti-monitoring checks the malware has is unusual. So, too, is the large number of obfuscation layers for payloads and the malware's attempts to substitute or generate new custom command-and-control (C2) stager payloads in response to analysis attempts: "Some obfuscation techniques, such as using PowerShell get-alias to perform [the invoke-expression cmdlet] are very rarely seen."</p>

The malicious activities were performed in an OpSec-aware manner with different types of anti-analysis checks and evasion attempts throughout the attack, at a relatively high operational tempo with custom payloads injected.

"Based on the details of the attack, one takeaway for other organizations is paying extra attention to monitoring your security tools," the spokesperson says. "Organizations should ensure security tools work as expected and avoid relying on a single security tool or technology to detect threats."

A Growing Cyber Threat

The STEEP#MAVERICK campaign is only the latest in a growing number that have targeted defense contractors and suppliers in recent years. Many of these campaigns have involved state-backed actors operating out of China, Russia, North Korea, and other countries.

In January, for instance, the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) issued an alert warning of Russian state-sponsored actors targeting so-called cleared defense contractors (CDCs) in attacks designed [to steal sensitive US defense information and technology](#). The CISA alert described the attacks as targeting a wide swath of CDCs, including those involved in developing combat systems, intelligence and surveillance technologies, weapons and missile development, and combat vehicle and aircraft design.

In February, researchers at Palo Alto Networks reported on at least four US defense contractors being targeted in a campaign to distribute [a fileless, socketless backdoor called SockDetour](#). The attacks were part of a broader campaign that the security vendor had investigated along with the National Security Agency in 2021 involving a Chinese advanced persistent group that [targeted defense contractors](#) and organizations in multiple other sectors.

Defense Contractors: A Vulnerable Segment

Adding to the concerns over the rising volume of cyberattacks is the relative vulnerability of many defense contractors, despite having secrets that should be closely guarded.

Recent research that Black Kite conducted into the security practices of the top 100 US defense contractors showed that nearly a third (32%) are [vulnerable to ransomware attacks](#). This is because of factors like leaked or compromised credentials, and weak practices in areas such as credential management, application security and Security Sockets Layer/Transport Layer Security.

Seventy-two percent of the respondents in the Black Kite report have experienced at least one incident involving a leaked credential.

There could be light at the end of the tunnel: The US Department of Defense, in conjunction with industry stakeholders, has developed a set of cybersecurity best practices for military contractors to use to protect sensitive data. Under the DoD's Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification program, defense contractors are required to implement these practices — and get certified as having them — to be able to sell to government. The bad news? The rollout of the program [has been delayed](#).

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HEADLINE	09/28 Hackers share cracked post-exploit toolkit
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/hackers-now-sharing-cracked-brute-ratel-post-exploitation-kit-online/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>The Brute Ratel post-exploitation toolkit has been cracked and is now being shared for free across Russian-speaking and English-speaking hacking communities.</p> <p>For those unfamiliar with Brute Ratel C4 (BRC4), it is a post-exploitation toolkit created by Chetan Nayak, an ex-red teamer at Mandiant and CrowdStrike.</p>

Red teamers are cybersecurity professionals whose job is to try and breach a corporate network to learn its flaws, while those on the blue team attempt to defend against these attacks.

After these exercises, both groups discuss what was found to shore up defenses and enhance security.

Similar to Cobalt Strike, Brute Ratel is a toolkit used by red teamers to deploy agents, called badgers, on compromised network devices and use them to execute commands remotely and spread further on a network.

Brute Ratel is cracked

Over the past few years, cracked versions of [Cobalt Strike have been so heavily abused](#) by threat actors and ransomware gangs that it is more easily detected by security software.

Due to this, some threat actors and ransomware gangs have been [quietly switching to Brute Ratel](#) for their attacks by allegedly creating fake US companies to pass the licensing verification system.

However, things are about to change, as cyber threat intelligence researcher Will Thomas (aka [BushidoToken](#)) has reported that a cracked copy of Brute Ratel is now circulating widely among threat actors in online hacking forums.

"There are now multiple posts on multiple of the most populated cybercrime forums where data brokers, malware developers, initial access brokers, and ransomware affiliates all hang out," warns Thomas in a [new report](#) on the cracked version of Brute Ratel.

"This includes BreachForums, CryptBB, RAMP, Exploit[.]in, and Xss[.]is, as well as various Telegram and Discord groups."

From a brief search on both the XSS and Breached hacking forums, threat actors have created multiple topics where they have been sharing the cracked version of Brute Ratel C4 version 1.2.2 since the middle of September.

In the past, Brute Ratel developer Chetan Nayak told BleepingComputer that he could revoke the licenses for any customers abusing Brute Ratel for malicious purposes.

However, Nayak claims that the uncracked version was uploaded to VirusTotal, which was then cracked by the "Russian group Molecules" to remove the license check.

Regardless of how the software was leaked, it is unfortunately too late.

Thomas has told BleepingComputer that the cracked version works and does not appear to be tampered with, meaning we will likely see wide usage of the toolkit shortly.

"Yes, you don't need to enter the license key, and no doesn't look tampered to me or my colleagues in Curated Intel," explained Thomas in a conversation with BleepingComputer.

In fact, threat actors have already begun sharing screenshots on hacking forums of them testing the toolkit.

What is most concerning to Thomas is that Brute Ratel has the ability to generate shellcode that is not easily detected by security software at this time.

"One of the most concerning aspects of the BRC4 tool for many security experts is its ability to generate shellcode that is undetected by many EDR and AV products," explained Thomas in his report.

"This extended window of detection evasion can give threat actors enough time to establish initial access, begin lateral movement, and achieve persistence elsewhere."

	Thomas recommends security, windows, and network admins review MdSec's blog on Brute Ratel C4 to learn more about detecting the software on their networks.
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HEADLINE	09/28 Attackers less than 10hrs to find weakness
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/attackers-less-than-ten-hours-find-weaknesses?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>The average ethical hacker can find a vulnerability that allows the breach of the network perimeter and then exploit the environment in less than 10 hours, with penetration testers focused on cloud security gaining access most quickly to targeted assets. And further, once a vulnerability or weakness is found, about 58% of ethical hackers can break into an environment in less than five hours.</p> <p>That's according to a survey of 300 experts by the SANS Institute and sponsored by cybersecurity services firm Bishop Fox, which also found that the most common weaknesses exploited by the hackers include vulnerable configurations, software flaws, and exposed Web services, survey respondents stated.</p> <p>The results mirror metrics for real-world malicious attacks and highlight the limited amount of time that companies have to detect and respond to threats, says Tom Eston, associate vice president of consulting of Bishop Fox.</p> <p>"Five or six hours to break in, as an ethical hacker myself, that is not a huge surprise," he says. "It matches up to what we are seeing the real hackers doing, especially with social engineering and phishing and other realistic attack vectors."</p> <p>The survey is the latest data point from cybersecurity companies' attempts to estimate the average time organizations have to stop attackers and interrupt their activities before significant damage is done.</p> <p>Cybersecurity services firm CrowdStrike, for example, found that the average attacker "breaks out" from their initial compromise to infect other systems in less than 90 minutes. Meanwhile, the length of time that attackers are able to operate on victim's networks before being detected was 21 days in 2021, slightly better than the 24 days in the prior year, according to cybersecurity services firm Mandiant.</p> <p>Organizations Not Keeping Up</p> <p>Overall, nearly three-quarters of ethical hackers think most organizations lack the necessary detection and response capabilities to stop attacks, according to the Bishop Fox-SANS survey. The data should convince organizations to not just focus on preventing attacks, but aim to quickly detect and respond to attacks as a way to limit damage, Bishop Fox's Eston says.</p> <p>"Everyone eventually is going to be hacked, so it comes down to incident response and how you respond to an attack, as opposed to protecting against every attack vector," he says. "It is almost impossible to stop one person from clicking on a link."</p> <p>In addition, companies are struggling to secure many parts of their attack surface, the report stated. Third parties, remote work, the adoption of cloud infrastructure, and the increased pace of application development all contributed significantly to expanding organizations' attack surfaces, penetration testers said.</p> <p>Yet the human element continues to be the most critical vulnerability, by far. Social engineering and phishing attacks, together, accounted for about half (49%) of the vectors with the best return on hacking investment, according to respondents. Web application attacks, password-based attacks, and ransomware account for another quarter of preferred attacks.</p> <p>"[I]t should come as no surprise that social engineering and phishing attacks are the top two vectors, respectively," the report stated. "We've seen this time and time again, year after year — phishing reports continually increase, and adversaries continue to find success within those vectors."</p>

Just Your Average Hacker

The survey also developed a profile of the average ethical hacker, with nearly two-thirds of respondents having between a year and six years of experience. Only one in 10 ethical hackers had less than a year in the profession, while about 30% had between seven and 20 years of experience.

Most ethical hackers have experience in network security (71%), internal penetration testing (67%), and application security (58%), according to the survey, with red teaming, cloud security, and code-level security as the next most popular types of ethical hacking.

The survey should remind companies that technology alone cannot solve cybersecurity problems — solutions require training employees to be aware of attacks, Eston says.

"There is not a single blinky-box technology that is going to repel all the attacks and keep your organization safe," he says. "It is a combination of people process and technology, and that has not changed. Organizations gravitate toward the latest and greatest tech ... but then they ignore security awareness and training their employees to recognize social engineering."

With attackers focused on exactly those weaknesses, he says, organizations need to change how they are developing their defenses.

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Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	09/29 Iran: rise of terror groups in Afghanistan
SOURCE	https://en.mehrnews.com/news/191916/Iran-warns-about-rise-of-terrorist-groups-in-Afghanistan
GIST	<p>Addressing a UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Afghanistan, Zahra Ershadi expressed concern over the reports on the resurgence of ISIL-affiliated terrorist groups in Afghanistan.</p> <p>"The de-facto authorities must commit to fighting terrorism and ensure to take all appropriate steps to protect diplomatic and consular premises against any intrusion or damage and prevent attacks on diplomatic premises, agents, and consular officers," she said.</p> <p>"Afghanistan must no longer serve as a haven for terrorist groups like ISIL and al-Qaeda," she added.</p> <p>The Iranian diplomat urged the de-facto Afghan authorities to fulfill their international obligations as a member of the international community and to establish an "inclusive and representative" government that accurately reflects the country's multi-ethnic society.</p> <p>"Only a government comprised of all Afghans can guarantee and protect their rights," Ershadi said.</p> <p>Elsewhere in her remarks, the envoy stressed the importance of fighting drug trafficking, saying that Iran is directly affected by this menace and pays a high price for it.</p> <p>"Over the past 40 years, Iran has played an active role in combating drug trafficking in the region, in which, nearly 4,000 members of Iran's law enforcement forces have been martyred and over 12,000 others have been injured," Ershadi added.</p> <p>She also noted that Iran has used its capacities and resources to help the Afghan people overcome their challenges and said the Islamic Republic has been hosting millions of refugees who have unfortunately received minimal international assistance in the last 40 years.</p> <p>After the Taliban takeover, Iran never closed its border with Afghanistan and thousands of Afghans have entered Iran on a daily basis since last year, she added.</p>

"However, neighbors of Afghanistan, including Iran, should not feel all the burdens associated with receiving Afghan refugees. Other countries should welcome refugees as well," Ersahdi pointed out.

She once again urged the international community to continue to assist Afghanistan, saying, "Other conflicts must not divert attention away from or ignore the situation in Afghanistan."

"While humanitarian and development assistance is critical to keeping Afghans alive, maintaining basic services, and bolstering the economy, they are not long-term solutions and must be supplemented by sustained economic growth," the Iranian envoy added.

She further emphasized the need to fully release the frozen assets belong to the Afghan people in full, "without being politicized or conditional in any way."

Ershadi said, "Sanctions imposed on specific individuals and entities in Afghanistan must also not obstruct humanitarian, economic, or development cooperation with Afghanistan. The sanctions should not have an impact on efforts to revitalize the Afghan economy, as the Secretary-General has repeatedly called for measures to give the Afghan economy breathing room."

She pledged the continuation of Iran's efforts to assist the Afghan people and work with the war-ravaged country's neighbors and other partners to "ensure durable peace and sustainable development in Afghanistan."

Ershadi welcomed the appointment of Roza Otunbayeva as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

She vowed Iran will support UNAMA in its "efforts to address the humanitarian crisis and facilitate the intra-Afghan political process to promote peace and stability in the country."

The Taliban, who had previously ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, took power again on August 15 last year as the US was in the middle of a chaotic troop withdrawal. The group announced the formation of a caretaker government weeks later.

Following the Taliban's takeover, the US and its allies rushed to cut off Afghanistan's access to international aid and froze nearly \$10 billion in assets belonging to the country's central bank. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank followed suit.

As a result of the humanitarian crisis, hundreds of thousands of Afghans have made their way across the border into Iran since last year. According to international aid organizations, around 4,000 to 5,000 people are streaming into Iran each day, escaping the horrors of poverty and insecurity fueled by the US and its allies.

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HEADLINE	09/28 US: terrorism concerns in Afghanistan
SOURCE	https://www.voanews.com/a/us-voices-terrorism-concerns-in-afghanistan-opts-for-taliban-engagement-/6767158.html
GIST	<p>Al-Qaida's former leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, had freedom in the Taliban-controlled Afghan capital before he was assassinated in a U.S. drone strike, a senior U.S. official said on Wednesday.</p> <p>"He was unquestionably a threat to the United States and he had greater freedom to operate in Kabul than from wherever he came from," Thomas West, U.S. special representative for Afghanistan, said at an event at the Center for International and Strategic Studies.</p> <p>Al-Zawahiri was targeted on July 31 at a house in downtown Kabul. Taliban authorities have not confirmed his death.</p>

In the aftermath of the drone strike in Kabul, both the U.S. and Taliban have accused each other of violating the February 2020 U.S.-Taliban agreement, widely known as the Doha Agreement, that commits the Taliban to prevent terror threats to the U.S. and its allies from territories under Taliban control.

West said the U.S. is deeply concerned about a number of other terrorist groups active in Afghanistan.

“We have concerns about al-Qaida in the Indian subcontinent, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Laskhar-e-Toiba, Ansarullah and a range of terrorist groups that still have an active presence in Afghanistan that we are exceedingly concerned about,” he said.

Last week at the U.N. General Assembly, Pakistan’s prime minister, Shahbaz Sharif, voiced similar concerns about the presence of terrorist groups in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

The Taliban swiftly rejected Sharif’s remarks, saying in a statement that they will not allow Afghan territory to be used against any country.

Despite concerns about their counterterrorism commitments, the U.S. has opted to remain engaged with the Taliban.

“We have been in touch with Taliban leaders since the strike and, to be clear, even in the wake of this event, we are prepared to engage pragmatically with the Taliban regarding terrorism concerns,” West said.

2,000 ISIS fighters

On Tuesday, the U.N. warned that the Taliban are failing to bringing security to Afghanistan as terror groups like IS-KB increasingly kill Afghans across the country.

At least 700 Afghans have died in armed conflict, mostly in attacks by IS-KB (Islamic State Khorasan Branch), since Taliban seized power last year, the U.N. has reported.

Amid the mayhem following the rapid collapse of the former Afghan government last year, jails were opened and thousands of inmates, including IS-KB fighters, were set free across the country.

“There was a big prison break,” West said, adding that it was unclear who within the Taliban released the prisoners and whether they knew who the inmates were.

“But some of the most concerning best-trained ISIS-K fighters they let out, it was about 2,000 individuals. Some of those individuals are folks we’re truly worried about.”

The Taliban call IS-KB fighters “Khawarij,” a reference to a group of Muslims who allegedly deviated from mainstream Islam in the 7th century, and claim to have killed dozens over the last year.

While U.S. officials have called IS-KB a common enemy, the Taliban have reportedly refused direct counterterror collaboration with the U.S. and insist they can address the terror group independently.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	09/27 China opens police stations—in Canada
SOURCE	https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/first-reading-why-beijing-is-allegedly-opening-police-stations-on-canadian-soil
GIST	The People’s Republic of China has opened at least three police stations on Canadian soil as part of an alleged attempt by the country’s security state to keep an eye on the Chinese-Canadian diaspora.

Three addresses in Toronto are known to be registered as “service stations” operated by the Fuzhou Public Security Bureau, a police force active in the Chinese metropolis of Fuzhou.

The revelations were contained in a [newly published report](#) by the Asian human rights group Safeguard Defenders.

China maintains that the stations exist simply to assist expats in completing administrative tasks such as renewing driver’s licences.

Safeguard Defenders holds that the stations function mainly as outposts for the Chinese policy of “Involuntary Return” – a program of compelling Chinese nationals to return home whenever the country’s security service deems that they’ve violated Chinese law. “These operations eschew official bilateral police and judicial cooperation,” they wrote.

In just the last year, reported the group, **Chinese authorities have claimed that 230,000 of their expats have been “persuaded to return” on various charges.** According to Safeguard Defenders, these returns are often obtained by visiting extreme sanctions on the families of those targeted, such as asset seizures and prohibition from seeking government health care or education.

A reporter for the Globe and Mail [visited](#) the three Toronto addresses that have been cited as Fuzhou Public Security Bureau stations. One was a private home, the other was a mall populated largely with Chinese-Canadian businesses and the third was the office of a registered non-profit known as the Canada Toronto FuQing Business Association.

The Globe and Mail noted that the Association was founded with direct Chinese government oversight, and that its honorary president has previously praised Beijing’s efforts to expand its administrative state abroad in order to help expats feel “the warmth” of the motherland.

Canada is but one of several dozen countries that are now home to overseas outposts of Chinese law enforcement. This week, a [report in The Irish Times](#) noted the opening of a Fuzhou Overseas Police Service Station in central Dublin.

In comments to the newspaper, China’s Ireland Embassy said the station was merely a place for Fuzhou expats to do routine paperwork. “During the past two years, the pandemic made international travels not easy and quite a few Chinese nationals found their Chinese ID cards and/or driver licences expired or about to expire, and yet they could not get the ID renewed back in China in time,” they said.

Canada-based dissidents of the Beijing government have long warned Canadian authorities that they face organized harassment from Chinese authorities. In 2019, the New York Times [profiled](#) Sheng Xue, a Mississauga-based opponent of the People’s Republic of China who faced a relentless stream of cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns intended to discredit her.

“I thought I’d have a safe, happy life in Canada,” Sheng told the Times of her 1989 escape from China in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square Massacre. But the Chinese Communist Party, she added, “was already here.”

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HEADLINE	09/28 District 12 fire commissioners in probe
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3652323/commissioner-mason-county-fire-employees-investigation-misuse-funds/
GIST	<p>A fraud investigation report from the Washington State Auditor’s office revealed that nearly \$200,000 in public funds may have been misappropriated by three Mason County employees with Fire District 12. The fire chief, her father — one of three District 12 fire commissioners — and her secretary were identified as alleged suspects in the investigation.</p> <p>The report discovered this may had been occurring for approximately five years.</p>

“They were very difficult to work with, and that, of course, is a red flag in and of itself,” state auditor Pat McCarthy said.

Mason County Commissioner Kevin Shuttty believes all three fire commissioners representing the district should resign. The only ways a fire commissioner can be removed from the position are voter recall or resignation, as they are elected officials.

“There’s really no process for the county commission to remove other independently elected officials like fire district commissioners,” said Shuttty. “However, they should do the right thing and resign.”

To retrieve the documents, the state auditor’s office had to request multiple court subpoenas, but McCarthy said sloppy record-keeping makes it hard to decipher where most of the money went.

“There were ten questionable payments totaling about \$10,000,” McCarthy said. “Of that amount, \$5,700 was for maintenance services, but the payments for maintenance services were not adequately supported to determine if the work was actually performed [including] the dates when the work was completed and how the compensation was calculated.”

Shuttty believes the investigation was prompted by people living within the district.

“They weren’t seeing their fire commission meet under the open public meetings act. I think it was difficult for them to get responses to questions that they’re asking about insurance rates and other basic questions,” Shuttty said. “[But] they were afraid that if they call 911, that they would get a different level of service than other people that weren’t pursuing accountability and transparency at the fire district.”

According to Shuttty, the misuse of funds may have an impact on the fire district’s ability to provide essential public safety and emergency response.

The auditor’s report was sent to the Mason County’s Sheriff’s office. If the sheriff’s office believes laws were broken, the case would go to the county prosecutor to decide charges.

“Sadly for the folks that live out in Matlock, this is probably the tip of the iceberg, and there’s probably a lot more to come in terms of outcomes from these investigations that are ongoing,” Shuttty said.

KIRO Newsradio reached out to Mason County Fire District 12 for comment, but no one has responded to the request as of this reporting.

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HEADLINE	09/28 UK 5,000 empty ghost flights since 2019
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/sep/28/revealed-5000-completely-empty-ghost-flights-in-uk-since-2019-data-shows
GIST	<p>More than 5,000 completely empty passenger flights have flown to or from UK airports since 2019, the Guardian can reveal.</p> <p>A further 35,000 commercial flights have operated almost empty since 2019, with fewer than 10% of seats filled, according to analysis of data from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). This makes a total of about 40,000 “ghost flights”.</p> <p>In one quarter, for example, 62 empty planes left Luton airport for Poland, while in another, Heathrow saw 663 almost empty flights going to and from the US. Both quarters were during the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Air travel results in more carbon emissions an hour than any other consumer activity and is dominated by a minority of frequent flyers, making it a focus of climate campaigners. They called the ghost flight</p>

revelations “shocking” and said a jet fuel tax was needed and airport expansion plans should be questioned. The UK government describes ghost flights as “[environmentally damaging](#)”.

Why ghost flights operate remains unclear. Only airlines know the reasons but they do not publish data that explains the practice. Ghost flights may run to fulfil “use-it-or-lose-it” airport slot rules, though these were suspended during the height of the pandemic. Other reasons cited by airlines include Covid repatriation flights or the repositioning of aircraft. But these cannot be verified and campaigners said more transparency was needed.

The new data gives the fullest picture to date of the number of UK ghost flights, as [previous data](#) only [counted international departures](#). It now includes international arrivals and flights within the UK. The CAA will now publish this data quarterly, as a result of a series of FoI requests by the Guardian.

“Publication of this data is a step in the right direction, but we need more transparency to understand why these inefficient, polluting practices continue, and to hold the main airline culprits to account,” said Tim Johnson at the Aviation Environment Federation. “Given the climate emergency, the revelation that so many near empty planes have been burning fossil fuels and adding to the CO₂ building up in the atmosphere is pretty shocking.”

A spokesperson for the Department for Transport said it would work with the CAA to monitor aircraft occupancy and seek greater transparency on the issue of ghost flights.

The data shows an average of 130 completely empty flights a month since 2019. The number of empty flights remained at a similar level before, during and after pandemic travel restrictions, with the second highest level in the second quarter of 2022. This suggests the reason the airlines chose to fly empty planes was not related to the impact of Covid on aviation.

Half of the empty flights were within the UK and the top seven airports accounted for two-thirds of the total, led by Birmingham with 1,455, Luton (1,307) and Bristol (758). The number of empty flights did not correlate with the total number of flights at each airport, suggesting they may reflect issues on specific routes.

There have been an average of 1,200 almost empty ghost flights a month since the start of 2020, when numbers jumped at the start of the Covid pandemic. Most of these – about 80% – were to or from foreign destinations.

Eight airports, among the busiest in the UK, accounted for about two-thirds of the almost empty flights since 2019, led by Heathrow (10,467), Manchester (3,309), Gatwick (2,766) and Stansted (2,197). Edinburgh and Glasgow both had more than 1,500 almost empty flights.

Alethea Warrington, at the climate charity Possible, said: “This shocking new data on ghost flights is yet another example of how the aviation industry cannot be trusted to get its emissions on track to tackle the climate crisis.”

“Following a summer of record-breaking, runway-melting heat, this wanton waste of carbon by airlines flies in the face of those feeling the full brunt of our warming world,” she said. “To end this for good, it’s time to start taxing kerosene to discourage unnecessary emissions.”

A spokesperson for Airlines UK said: “Millions of flights arrived and departed the UK between 2019 and 2022, with only a tiny fraction operating without or with few passengers and for a variety of operational reasons driven by the pandemic.”

Airlines have denied operating ghost flights to retain slots. The normal 80:20 rule, meaning 80% of flights on a route must operate to retain the valuable slots, only applies to the busiest airports and was suspended from the end of March 2020 because of the pandemic. It was reintroduced as a 50:50 rule in October 2021 and [rose to 70:30 from the end of March 2022](#).

Some airlines have said that some ghost flights took place during the pandemic to fly in Covid-related supplies on passenger planes. However, the CAA data records fewer than 300 flights since the start of 2020 carrying cargo but no passengers.

A spokesperson for Birmingham airport said: “Flight occupancy fell during the pandemic due to travel restrictions. During this time flights into Birmingham included British nationals returning from ‘red list’ countries, PPE and Afghan refugees.”

A Luton airport spokesperson said the reasons for the high number of ghost flights included Covid travel restrictions and regulatory requirements regarding aircraft airworthiness and pilot licensing. “Following the removal of all travel restrictions, average passenger loads per flight have returned to 88% this summer,” he said. Repositioning of aircraft and maintenance was among the reasons given by Bristol airport for its ghost flights.

Heathrow is the UK’s busiest airport and had the highest number of almost empty flights. A Heathrow spokesperson said: “At a time [during the pandemic] when the industry was losing billions, no operator would have been flying a plane without it being commercially viable or without an operational need. As borders closed to passengers, airlines switched to cargo operations, delivering vital medical supplies for the country.”

Anna Hughes, at the Flight Free UK campaign group, said: “Putting tens of thousands of empty or near-empty planes in the air during a climate crisis is a vast waste of money and a needless source of emissions. It makes a mockery of people’s efforts to reduce their own emissions. If it makes business sense for the airlines to do this, there’s something badly wrong with the business model.”

The spokesperson for Airlines UK said: “UK airlines are fully committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. Alongside filling our flights as much as possible, we are making ‘jet zero’ a reality by modernising our airspace to further reduce inefficiencies, using at least 10% sustainable aviation fuel by 2030 and driving the development of zero emission commercial aircraft.”

Johnson said: “Several reasons have been put forward for near empty flights during the pandemic, but the provision of 2019 data – a record year for airport passengers in the UK – highlights a wider problem. The data also shows that 50,000 aircraft arrived or departed from Heathrow and Gatwick alone in 2019 less than half full. This must cast doubt both on these airports’ claims that they are effectively full and need to expand and on their claims to be responding to the urgency of the climate challenge.”

All the flights in the CAA data are commercial passenger flights and air crew training flights are not included. There were thousands of ghost flights to oil rigs but these were not included in the Guardian analysis. The CAA data also lists Bournemouth airport as having 933 empty flights, but the airport said the vast majority of these were non-commercial flights run by a company that is a tenant at the airport.

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HEADLINE	09/28 China exploits ‘double-crossing companies’
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/sep/28/china-used-double-crossing-companies-steal-us-nati/
GIST	<p>Although the federal government invests heavily in research, it’s China that gets more out of it, according to a Defense Department study of its spending that is getting attention on Capitol Hill.</p> <p>Sen. Joni Ernst, Iowa Republican, touted the findings of the study Wednesday. She said the Pentagon’s conclusions should be worrying not just to the defense world but also to every government agency that spends on research that might be of interest to China.</p> <p>“China, not the U.S., is the ultimate beneficiary of DoD and other [U.S. government] research investments,” the Pentagon’s review concluded, according to Ms. Ernst.</p>

The Pentagon's review is not public and Ms. Ernst's office said it could not share the document, but she described the trickery at work. She said it goes beyond the traditional boundaries of intellectual property theft.

China finds companies that are receiving federal research funding and recruits those firms to work for institutions associated with its military operations. The American company then dissolves, and whatever has been developed with the U.S. funds is transferred to a subsidiary in China, Ms. Ernst said.

She blasted the "double-crossing companies" that take the cash and then take their work to China.

In one instance, she said, a research team was working on four grants to develop drone and spacecraft technology. It was recruited by the Chinese government and now works "for institutions affiliated with the communist regime's defense agency."

Those kinds of transfers have also taken place on research into biohazard detectors, solar energy technology and pharmaceuticals, as well as designs for "military devices," she said.

"Folks, no matter how much of your money Washington spends to 'win' the global tech race, we will never win by surrendering American-made innovation and subsidizing our adversaries," Ms. Ernst said. "This cycle will continue until these grant programs are both required and empowered to hold unscrupulous recipients of taxpayer funds accountable for selling out to China."

The Defense Department report looked at spending by the Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer programs, which require specific government agencies to set aside money from their research and development funds to promote high-risk work by small businesses.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies said in a report this month that the programs are worth about \$3.2 billion and that the Defense Department accounts for \$1.7 billion of the total.

According to CSIS, the secret Pentagon audit looked over a sample of the Defense Department's awards and found "nearly all cases" showed China benefiting more than the U.S.

"The study's authors cautioned that the study sample was small and that their methodologies warrant review, but their findings are clearly a matter of concern for U.S. policymakers," the think tank said.

In response to an inquiry from The Washington Times, the Pentagon did not provide the non-public report but said none of the technology involved is classified. Once a project becomes classified, the Small Business Innovation Research program can no longer fund it.

The Pentagon said the spending helps small firms bridge what is known in the industry as the "Valley of Death" — the difficulty in taking a project from proof of concept to production.

"Difficulty accessing capital can lead to the risk posed by adversaries. In other words, if DoD won't fund them, another country likely will," the Defense Department said.

The Pentagon said it has imposed controls on the spending, including requirements on disclosures of who gets the money. Training is also available to combat cybersecurity threats.

Ms. Ernst is eyeing more steps. She has co-written legislation that would renew the small-business programs through 2025 but include a ban on doling out money to a firm with ties to China or any other "foreign country of concern" and poses a conflict of interest or a national security risk.

The bill also requires the National Science Foundation and the Departments of Defense, Energy and Health and Human Services to report back on how much foreign militaries have tried to hijack the programs.

	That bill, sponsored by Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin, Maryland Democrat, and Ms. Ernst, cleared the Senate last week and is expected to see House action this week.
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HEADLINE	09/28 Outbreaks gaining or just awareness?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/28/briefing/a-wave-of-outbreaks.html
GIST	<p>These days, it seems as if outbreaks are everywhere.</p> <p>A rare strain of Ebola has emerged in Uganda, killing 23 people. In Zimbabwe, a measles outbreak has killed more than 700 children and infected thousands of others. In Syria, a cholera outbreak has left nearly 30 people dead and is spreading quickly. Fast-moving syphilis outbreaks are cropping up in Texas and the United Kingdom.</p> <p>And that was just in the past few weeks. Are outbreaks gaining steam, or are we just paying closer attention? To find out, I turned to my colleague Carl Zimmer, a veteran science writer and the author of “A Planet of Viruses.”</p> <p>What’s the story? More outbreaks, or more public attention?</p> <p>It’s a combination. It does seem as if in recent decades there have been more emerging diseases. One idea why is that humanity is growing and making more demands on the environment. We’re pushing into lots of ecosystems and coming into contact with lots of viruses that we didn’t have any contact with before, and there are more opportunities for spillovers. We also have international airplane travel and lots of trade, so we have lots of different ways to spread these pathogens around really quickly.</p> <p>Another reason we’re finding more emerging diseases is that scientists are actively looking for them and have better tools to find them. We still could be doing a lot more, but it’s a big difference from 20 or 30 years ago.</p> <p>Take this recent Ebola outbreak in Uganda. Africa has built up a very strong system for monitoring Ebola and quickly jumping into action when there is an outbreak. So we have a lot of information now about how many people have gotten it, and how many people have died, and what kind of Ebola it is.</p> <p>Unfortunately, it’s not the strain of Ebola that we have a good vaccine for. But now we can see these things in hours or days as opposed to not seeing them at all.</p> <p>Is science keeping up?</p> <p>The response to Covid offered a glimpse at what could be done if the world was focused on a new disease. Vaccines typically take 10 years or more to go from their design to getting into people’s arms — it took under a year to show that Covid vaccines were effective.</p> <p>But you can’t do it for free. These efforts require a lot of scientists, doing a lot of research. They require big clinical trials. I should also add that it turns out that, with the coronavirus, it wasn’t all that hard to make a vaccine that could provide protection.</p> <p>Compared with viruses like H.I.V., coronaviruses are a pretty simple target. Of course, the coronavirus is evolving, and so now we have to be thinking harder about long term protection. But if the next pathogen that emerges is more like H.I.V. than Covid, when it comes to vaccines, it could be a real problem. That would require a much more sophisticated approach. For example, we could have the first trials come through and show no efficacy at all. That would be terrible in the middle of a pandemic. We were lucky this time around that didn’t happen.</p> <p>Is there any conventional wisdom about where the next pandemic might come from?</p> <p>It’s not possible to say. There will be another pandemic, but we just don’t know enough about pathogens to say which one it will be and how bad it will be. We’re still in the early days of getting to know these bugs.</p>

Is it possible that another once-in-a-lifetime pandemic will occur soon?

I guess I would take issue with Covid being a once-in-a-lifetime event. I was alive when H.I.V. started to emerge as a problem. Since then, it's killed tens of millions of people. We actually deal with a lot of viruses and other pathogens all the time. Richer countries may have less trouble with them, but they're still a big problem for the world. So nobody should just sit back and say, "Well, we got Covid, so the next generation can worry about the next big one." There's no justification for that.

Turning to Covid, why haven't we seen a new variant since Omicron?

As far as scientists can tell, it seems like Omicron has hit on a really winning formula for being a coronavirus. And other versions of the virus just can't compete. They haven't found an evolutionary path to go up against Omicron.

What does that mean for the future of the pandemic?

It's really hard to make predictions about the future of evolution. But what we're seeing is that Omicron has a huge amount of space left to explore in terms of gaining new mutations and becoming even better at spreading among people.

And it's still possible that there's another SARS-CoV-2 out there that's not descended from Omicron that could suddenly jump out and take over. A new variant could be hiding right now inside of someone with a chronic infection. Or it might be in some animal. [White tailed deer](#) can hold on to these viruses for months and it's possible that it could come out of a deer in a new infectious form that our immunity can't fight against.

What does the future of the pandemic look like?

Cases are going down in some parts of the United States, but we still have over 400 people dying per day right now. And if you look back over the history of this pandemic, every time that the curve went down, there would be some people saying, "That's it, it's over." And every time in the past two and a half years, it would bottom out and then start to climb again.

I think we need to be prepared for a winter surge caused by a new version of Omicron. The updated boosters will definitely be able to help. But they are targeted at BA.5, and by December, I wouldn't be surprised if BA.5 is gone. Hopefully what takes its place will be similar enough that the updated vaccines will still provide good protection. But ultimately, we're going to have to figure out a way to get out of this evolutionary merry-go-round where we're constantly trying to catch up with the latest variant. There needs to be a better strategy.

When you look over the world of viruses, what are you keeping your eye on?

I'm not watching this individual virus or that individual virus, so much as I'm keeping an eye on the systems that we're building, or that we should be building. We need strong systems in place to recognize when new viruses are emerging. We need strong systems to be constantly developing vaccines and treatments for them. And we need public health systems that actually get vaccines to everyone, not just the rich people who can buy them.

At this point in the pandemic, how are these systems looking?

It's a mixed bag. There's a whole system of virus sampling and gene sequencing that's happening across Africa, which is fantastic. But some of the systems, particularly on the public health side, are not in great shape. Some experts have said that we're actually in worse shape now than we were before Covid. And keep in mind, about two and a half billion people aren't vaccinated for Covid at all. So if you can't even get billions of people vaccinated for the current pandemic, how do we expect to be able to be really ready for a new one in years to come?

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HEADLINE	09/28 DEA major fentanyl bust months-long ops
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/sep/28/feds-score-major-fentanyl-bust-confiscate-over-10-/
GIST	<p>Federal agents seized more than 10 million fentanyl pills and roughly 980 pounds of fentanyl powder in a months-long surge operation carried out across the country.</p> <p>The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration said its agents in total took more than 36 million lethal doses of the synthetic opioid off the street during the enforcement arm of the “One Pill Can Kill” initiative.</p> <p>The agency also said that over 330 weapons — including rifles, shotguns, pistols, and hand grenades — were confiscated during the operation that ran from May 23 through Sept. 8.</p> <p>This surge operation included investigating 390 cases involving the illegal trade in fentanyl. Authorities said that 51 cases were linked to overdose poisonings and 35 cases were directly tied to either the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, the two Mexican cartels that are most responsible for trafficking the opioid into the U.S.</p> <p>The DEA raised the alarm about new forms of the drug earlier this year, such as “rainbow fentanyl.” The multi-colored pills come in different shapes and sizes. These pills are believed to appeal to children and have been seized by authorities in 21 states.</p> <p>Federal authorities said that synthetic opioids are responsible for 66% of the record-setting 107,622 overdose deaths the U.S. witnessed in 2021.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/29 ‘Jugging’ thefts alarm authorities
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/sep/27/authorities-report-uptick-jugging-thefts/
GIST	<p>Law enforcement officials are sounding the alarm over a spike in “jugging” thefts, in which thieves patiently follow victims from ATMs, banks or stores to their homes or other locations before committing violent robberies.</p> <p>Police report that bank customers in affluent urban areas of Texas, California and Florida have been victims of the crime.</p> <p>Police said a Houston man was arrested Friday after following a Bank of America customer who had just withdrawn a large amount of cash. Security video, they said, captured images of Terrence Thompson, 59.</p> <p>A recent report from ABC’s “Good Morning America” said Austin has recorded 84 jugging cases this year.</p> <p>On Sept. 14, the Austin Police Department announced the arrest of a man they accused of stalking a customer from a Bank of America branch in North Austin. Jamarcus Drumgole, 31, was charged with assault and robbery at the customer’s apartment.</p> <p>In California, a woman was robbed in her driveway after she withdrew a large sum from North Stockton Wells Fargo Bank, Stockton’s ABC-10 news outlet reported Wednesday. The thief, who followed her home on the five-minute drive during the lunch hour, took her purse with her money, credit cards, ATM card and cellphone — and charged \$4,000 to her name within the hour.</p> <p>“All of a sudden, I heard tapping on my window, and it was just so quick and the window was being broke out and I started screaming,” the woman, who wished to remain anonymous, told ABC-10.</p> <p>The Stockton Police Department said it had received at least four “jugging” complaints this year.</p>

On Sept. 8, the Escambia County Sheriff's Office in Florida announced that two state residents accused of bank jugging in Alabama were also charged in a four-county smash-and-grab crime rampage.

Police said Isaiah Demarcus Satterfield and Bakaria Rayveon Fisher followed bank customers to their next stops and then smashed their car windows and stole their money.

Bank of America and Wells Fargo did not respond to requests for comment on incidents involving their branches.

According to law enforcement data, jugging has surged during the pandemic.

Authorities say the best way for people to prevent jugging is to avoid waving money and purchases in their hands as they walk out of banks or stores — and to pay attention to who might be watching.

The term “jugging” reportedly goes back decades. Some businesses brought cash to banks in jugs, though other etymologists say the word is an old nickname for bank bags.

In Texas, the Fort Worth-based law firm Varghese Summersett reports on its website that jugging typically leads to aggravated robbery and burglary of a vehicle or home.

Jugging also takes the form of “follow-home retail thefts,” in which thieves tail shoppers to their cars or homes. Some thieves wait for the owners to disappear before breaking in; others do not.

In follow-home retail thefts, thieves look for products to repackage and resell at lower prices — including baby formula, over-the-counter medications and teeth-whitener strips. The items have often expired by the time they hit the black market.

Daniel Lacalle, a professor of global economics at IE Business School in Spain, said bank jugging tends to rise when crooks need fast cash in difficult economic times.

“It is usually a sign of a weakening economy when some citizens feel compelled to take the risk of stealing from customers of a bank without robbing the bank itself because it is perceived as a small crime,” Mr. Lacalle said in an email Tuesday.

Some areas have taken steps to crack down.

In December, California Gov. Gavin Newsom announced more than \$30 million in public safety funding for police and prosecutors to fight a statewide rise in violent property and retail crimes. The Democrat's initiative followed a rash of smash-and-grab retail thefts and jugging attacks in the Los Angeles area.

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HEADLINE	09/28 Guinea ex-president on trial: 2009 massacre
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/28/world/africa/guinea-2009-massacre-trial.html
GIST	<p>DAKAR, Senegal — The trial of Guinea's former president and 10 others accused of responsibility for a 2009 stadium massacre and mass rape began Wednesday in the country's capital, in what survivors and relatives of victims hope will bring long-delayed justice.</p> <p>Thirteen years ago, on Sept. 28, 2009, security forces stormed a stadium where tens of thousands of pro-democracy protesters were demonstrating against the president at the time, Capt. Moussa Dadis Camara, who had seized power in a coup.</p> <p>More than 150 people were killed, hundreds of others were wounded and at least 109 women were raped or sexually assaulted, according to a U.N. investigation and witness accounts gathered by Human Rights Watch.</p>

The trial is unprecedented in Guinea, with a new courtroom built in the capital, Conakry, for the occasion. The case is seen by many human rights experts as a test for a West African country in holding army officers to account.

The trial comes even as [military leaders have toppled governments](#) in the region, including in Guinea, a nation of 13 million where Col. Mamady Doumbouya, a U.S.-trained officer, [staged a coup last year](#). Guinea has suffered from decades of state repression and impunity, leaving some observers wondering whether its judiciary, which has been historically been weak, can hold a fair trial on the massacre.

Since Colonel Doumbouya seized power in September, 2021, the Guinean authorities have cracked down on civil liberties, including banning protests, dissolving the country's main pro-democracy coalition, and firing live ammunition at demonstrators. At least seven protesters died in clashes with security forces this summer. The government of Colonel Doumbouya has pushed for the trial, which is expected to last at least a year, and has framed it as a chance for overdue justice.

Many survivors of the 2009 massacre and relatives of victims have praised him for bringing the country's former president and others to court, despite the criticisms of his rule by rights groups.

"He is a soldier who thinks about us, who takes our pain and abandonment into consideration," said Sarah Cissé, 43, a Guinean political activist and former humanitarian worker who participated in the 2009 demonstration. "I want to thank him."

The officials standing trial include Captain Camara; his aide-de-camp, who witnesses say was at the stadium and directing guards there; and the head of a gendarme unit involved in the killings. Shortly after the massacre, Captain Camara deflected responsibility on his aide-de-camp — who shot Captain Camara in the head in retaliation, according to the authorities at the time. Captain Camara, who had held power in Guinea for about a year, survived the shooting and lived in exile in Burkina Faso until returning to Guinea last week for the trial.

His lawyer, Pépé Antoine Lama, said Captain Camara would plead not guilty. "He has always asked to return home to face justice." The [U.N. investigation](#) said he bore "command responsibility" in the massacre and accused him of "criminal responsibility."

The United Nations has [labeled](#) the violence in 2009 as a crime against humanity, and Human Rights Watch said the violence [was premeditated](#).

Witness [testimony](#) revealed that hundreds of members of the red beret presidential guard, gendarmes and anti-riot police [stormed](#) the stadium and [opened fire](#) as civil society activists and opposition supporters were chanting in a largely peaceful atmosphere.

Soldiers later raped dozens of women inside the stadium and around it, sexually assaulted them with their weapons and killed several after raping them, according to [testimonies](#) collected by Human Rights Watch. The United Nations said that the security forces were armed with pistols, clubs, knives and AK-47-style rifles, among other weapons.

More women were then taken from the stadium and a clinic to private homes, where members of the presidential guard raped them for days, according to testimonies.

"It unfolded for hours, or more, for some," Ms. Cissé, who said she had been sexually assaulted by so many soldiers that she fainted. "In broad daylight."

Asmaou Diallo, whose son was killed in the stadium, said she wanted "justice, reparations and guarantees that this will never happen again."

The Guinean authorities began an investigation into the massacre in 2010, which concluded in 2017. But it took five more years and a new political leadership to organize the trial.

	<p>Still, many human rights observers doubt that the trial can take place fairly — or safely — in Guinea’s current political climate. And lawyers say they have received few guarantees that witnesses and relatives of victims could, without fear of retribution, testify against the accused, who may still benefit from some support among the armed forces.</p> <p>Alpha Amadou Bah, the head of a lawyers’ collective representing more than 600 survivors and relatives of victims, said there was also a risk that the junta would turn it into a political trial.</p> <p>On Tuesday evening, Captain Camara was interviewed by a prosecutor and detained alongside two former senior military officers, his lawyer told reporters.</p> <p>“How the trial goes on efficiently and meaningfully, with an opening that is not just ceremonial, remains an open question,” said Elise Keppler, an associate international justice director at Human Rights Watch, who was in Conakry for the trial’s opening.</p> <p>Ms. Cissé, the former political activist and survivor, echoed these concerns. “If we start, and we don’t finish, it will only be more traumatizing for us, as victims.”</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Teen in Amber alert killed in police shootout
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/28/us/california-fatal-shooting-police.html
GIST	<p>On Tuesday morning, the authorities in San Bernardino County, Calif., were pursuing a man who they believed had fatally shot a woman and abducted his teenage daughter when finally his pickup truck came to a halt.</p> <p>Bullets were flying. A figure wearing tactical gear and a helmet emerged from the truck and ran toward sheriff’s deputies, the authorities said. The figure fell.</p> <p>Then they realized: This was the girl they had been trying to save. Now she and her father were dead.</p> <p>Just the day before, the California Highway Patrol had released an Amber Alert, declaring the girl, Savanna Graziano, 15, to be missing. It described her as 5-foot-2, with brown hair and brown eyes, and her father, Anthony John Graziano, 45, as “armed and dangerous.”</p> <p>In a news conference on Tuesday, the San Bernardino County sheriff, Shannon D. Dicus, said that details surrounding the chase and shootout, in which his deputies were involved, were still “preliminary.”</p> <p>“This investigation is going to take at least 24 hours before we’re able to provide you with more information as to what happened and exactly what the circumstances are as it relates to the officer involved situation,” Sheriff Dicus said. But, he added, “at this time, both Anthony Graziano and Savanna are deceased.”</p> <p>The sheriff’s office did not respond on Wednesday to requests for further comment regarding exactly how Savanna Graziano, or Mr. Graziano, were killed. But in a video statement posted Wednesday afternoon on Twitter, Sheriff Dicus said that detectives who processed the scene throughout the night had gathered evidence indicating that Savanna might have participated in the shootout.</p> <p>“Based on the information, evidence suggests that Savanna Graziano was a participant in shooting at our deputies,” Sheriff Dicus said.</p> <p>The complex pursuit and shootout spanned many miles through San Bernardino County, east of Los Angeles, the authorities said, and was set in motion early Monday morning, when shots were fired near an elementary school in Fontana, a city about 50 miles east of downtown Los Angeles, the Fontana Police Department said Monday on Facebook.</p>

The police said that was where Mr. Graziano fatally shot a woman believed to be Savanna's mother in a "domestic violence incident."

Fontana police said that officers had arrived shortly after 7:30 a.m. to find the woman with "multiple gunshot wounds." She was transported to a local trauma center, where she was pronounced dead, the police said.

Jason DeLair, a spokesman for the city of Fontana confirmed by phone on Wednesday that the woman killed was Savanna's mother, Tracy Martinez, 45.

According to [The Associated Press](#), the Fontana police said Savanna had been living with her father in the weeks before the shooting.

The police said that Mr. Graziano was driving a white 2017 Nissan Frontier with California plates that had a rack over the bed of the truck and a "distinct" animal sticker on the rear quarter panel.

At 10:25 a.m. Tuesday, Mr. Graziano's truck was spotted near the intersection of Highway 395 and Highway 58, Sheriff Dicus said during the news conference. Sheriff's deputies soon gave chase.

"As a result of that pursuit, the suspect immediately starts firing at our deputies," Sheriff Dicus said, adding that Mr. Graziano had put "several rounds through the windshield of the patrol unit." He said that the pursuit continued east along Highway 58, toward Interstate 15, with Mr. Graziano firing back at the deputies "the entire time."

Sheriff Dicus said that Mr. Graziano had shot at and disabled a second police car, before going off the road in Hesperia, which is about 75 miles northeast of downtown Los Angeles. The firefight continued, he said, and Mr. Graziano's truck stopped.

It was at that point, Sheriff Dicus said, that a person wearing tactical gear, later determined to be Savanna, got out of the passenger side of the car and ran toward the sheriff's deputies, at which point she fell to the ground. Mr. Graziano was also killed, but further details were unclear, Sheriff Dicus said.

"The only weapon that we're able to confirm right now is a rifle taken from the suspect vehicle," he said.

The authorities, he added, were analyzing video footage from aircraft that had been tracking the scene.

Sheriff Dicus said that deputies had realized it was Savanna wearing the tactical gear when they attempted to provide her with medical assistance. She was taken to a nearby hospital, he said, and pronounced dead at 11:52 a.m.

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HEADLINE	09/28 Oakland school shooting: 6 injured
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/28/us/oakland-ca-school-shooting.html
GIST	<p>OAKLAND, Calif. — Six people were shot on Wednesday at a school campus in Oakland, in a burst of gunfire that erupted minutes before hundreds of students were scheduled to be dismissed for the afternoon.</p> <p>The shootings — which left two adult victims hospitalized with life-threatening injuries and panicked scores of families who arrived to retrieve students only to find the campus in lockdown — came amid a rash of gun violence in the Northern California city, where the authorities have recorded at least eight gunshot deaths in the past nine days.</p> <p>Police said all of the victims were over 18 and had "some affiliation" with Rudsdale Newcomer High School, one of four programs at the East Oakland school complex. But they did not immediately specify whether those who had been injured were students, school workers or bystanders and said they were still searching for the gunman.</p>

Darren Allison, the assistant chief of the Oakland Police Department, said that “other individuals” might have been involved in the shooting, which began at about 12:45 p.m. He did not say whether the shootings had been targeted or random. Four other victims had been treated at local hospitals and were either released or expected to be discharged soon.

The Oakland authorities said the Police Department had investigated 360 assaults with a firearm this year, compared with 465 incidents by this time last year, a 23 percent reduction, and homicide rates have fallen slightly in the past year. But crime has long been an issue in economically depressed neighborhoods, including East Oakland. Alarm has risen in recent months among parents in the school district, which voted in 2020 in the wake of social justice demonstrations to disband its school police department and replace it with an alternative school safety plan.

“It’s a lot to process — our community, our parents, are feeling the weight of so much trauma,” said Treva Reid, an Oakland City Council member who represents the campus area.

The shooting was among more than 130 that have occurred this year at schools across the nation, including more than 30 that have resulted in injuries or deaths, according to a New York Times analysis of databases compiled by [Education Week](#) and the [Naval Postgraduate School’s Center for Homeland Defense and Security](#). The deadliest was the [mass shooting](#) at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, that claimed the lives of two adults and 19 children in May.

[Oakland](#) has already had a shooting this school year, in August, in which a 13-year-old boy was injured by the accidental discharge of a gun a 12-year-old student had brought to another East Oakland campus.

Libby Schaaf, the Oakland mayor, [said Wednesday afternoon](#) on Twitter that what had occurred on the campus “shocks the soul — our schools are sanctuaries for our children.”

“The unbridled access to firearms in our country is inexcusable,” she added.

The Oakland Police Department asked parents to meet their children at a church close to the school complex. There, dozens of teachers mingled with law enforcement personnel and reporters while waiting to return to campus after being evacuated.

The shooting occurred at the King Estate complex, which includes the headquarters for Sojourner Truth Independent Study; Bay Area Technology School, a charter program that serves students in grades six through 12; Rudsdale Continuation High School; and Rudsdale Newcomer High School.

Seth Feldman, the executive director at Bay Area Technology School, said the gunfire had rung out just minutes before school let out for the day, when the hallways would have been flooded with students. “Five minutes later,” he said, “and this would have been tragic.”

Guadalupe Guerrero, 17, a student at the continuation school whose mother had picked her up early, said she had received a frantic call from her best friend as they drove away from the school, telling her students had heard eight gunshots.

Angelica Nodal, whose son, Mateo, is an eighth grader at Bay Area Technology, said she had pulled up to the school to pick up her child and had found another parent screaming that there had been a shooting. As parents around her dialed 911, she said, she struggled to contain her alarm.

“It’s scary,” she said. “There’s kids, not only mine in there. Everyone matters in there.”

Mr. Feldman said a guard at the charter school had been shot in the leg. He also said one of his administrators, Ryan Hughes, had rushed to a student’s aid, applying pressure on a wound to stem the bleeding. “He pressed,” Mr. Feldman said. “He put his hands on him to make sure that he could be OK.”

Matthew Benjamin, a high school teacher at Bay Area Technology School, said he had been walking down a hallway when he heard what sounded like gunshots, one after another, right around the corner.

"It was a blur," Mr. Benjamin said. "I just instinctively turned around. I jumped back into the classroom; I told everyone get down. Kids were starting to flip out, and I grabbed hold of the door."

He said he had yelled at students to "get down." Mr. Benjamin's class locked the windows and hunkered down for about an hour.

Across the hallway, Sherman Moore, a science teacher, heard what he thought were fireworks. But he told his students to stay quiet, just in case.

Then a voice came on the intercom saying that the school was being locked down.

The students pushed tables and chairs up against the doors and waited, hoping for the best. About an hour later, police officers knocked on the door and evacuated everyone.

"Once we started walking up the hallway, I knew it was really serious, because they had us do this," Mr. Moore said, putting his hands above his head.

School officials said counseling would be made available for students, as the police asked for help from members of the public who might have had surveillance camera footage or any other recordings of the shootings. Oakland's police chief has said he plans to add officers and adjust deployment to address recent gun violence, much of which he said was gang-related.

"What happened today was wrong," John Sasaki, a spokesman for the Oakland Unified School District, said at a news conference. "It was very traumatic. It was devastating to our school community."

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HEADLINE	09/28 Volunteer groups help recover stolen bikes
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-police-work-with-bike-owner-to-get-back-stolen-bike#
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. — Every year thousands of bicycles are stolen in Seattle, according to the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), and with Seattle police staffing issues, bike theft is not a top priority. But in some cases, police do respond.</p> <p>It happened to a Capitol Hill bike owner, Sree Sankaranarayanan , whose \$5,800 Cannondale Supersix EVO 54 bike was swiped from his apartment garage. A thief cut through three heavy-duty locks and took off with his bicycle. It's the second bike he's had stolen in 10 months.</p> <p>Sree Sankaranarayanan said he saved up for months to get the bike and waited another seven months for it to be delivered. He had it for only about a month before it went missing.</p> <p>Sankaranarayanan is one of the dozens of bike theft victims taking action and working with volunteer groups to reunite people with their stolen bikes. These groups monitor bike sale activity online, even keeping an index of bike serial numbers, posting a stolen bike and sharing tips to prevent bikes from being stolen.</p> <p>One volunteer group called BRAT, the Bike Recovery Action Team, worked with Sree to recover his stolen bicycle. Sree began with their tips and searched for his bike online. He found what he believed was a picture of his bike on a Facebook marketplace page selling for about \$2,200.</p> <p>"We definitely try to get SPD involved if there is going to be a recovery, give them a heads up, 'hey we are going to meet this person'," said Eric a volunteer with BRAT. He works exclusively on tracking online sale listings, working to match stolen bikes for sale with their owners, "Unite people with their stolen bikes simple as that sometimes with law enforcement sometimes without."</p>

Eric's story is similar to other bike advocacy volunteers - his bike was stolen last October, right out of his garage.

"My beloved road bike was gone, lots of memories I rode the STP on it, just a lot of time with me and my bike, it's just kind of personal."

It took about a month to get it back, a bike shop called him after seeing his bike listed online as stolen. Someone brought it into their Seattle shop.

Ever since Eric says he's paying it forward.

"Once i got it back i don't know it's such a good feeling."

Sree was determined to get his bike back too.

He discovered the Facebook page ,with a photo of what he believed to be his missing bike, belonged to a man with a criminal record and contacted Seattle police.

Sree said an undercover officer met up with the man instead and arrested him. According to police documents filed with the King County Prosecutor's Office, police arrested Maximillion Deak.

A spokesperson for the prosecutor's office says he has a 'history of bike theft' and is a repeat offender, with offenses dating back to 2010, and ranging from Felony Theft to assaults and burglary.

His latest conviction was in 2021 for Burglary. Prosecutors say that was a bike case. Deak is being held at the King County Jail, the prosecutor's office alleges he violated the terms of that 2021 sentence and they're waiting on paperwork to file additional charges in the recent bike arrest.

"We were able to file warrants and get that person arrested," said Seattle Police Detective Patrick Michaud, with SPD public affairs.

When asked about advocacy members who consider his arrest a huge get and relief, "It's not surprising he was out there stealing others bikes we wish we could intervene a little bit earlier."

BRAT told KOMO News they are aware of the man and that they've been working for months to try and get him on Seattle police's radar.

SDOT recommends people use a U-lock to lock their bikes and to make sure they lock both the bike frame and wheel to a rack. Locking the second wheel is also recommended.

You can also register your bike online with a description, serial number, and photos to help recover it if it is stolen. SDOT recommends two free online registration systems, Bike Index and Project529.

Seattle Police strongly encourage bike owners to register their bikes serial number with one of the site. They tell KOMO News at times they've used Bike Index as a resource in a stolen bike case.

The department does not include bike theft data on their online crime dashboard. It's admittedly a lower priority, until it's not said Detective Michaud. "Bike thefts are a prolific crime here in Seattle at least we can slow it down for a little bit."

"I don't know if i can brag, I'm mostly happy I got my bike back, but sad it happened," Sankaranarayanan said.

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SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/seattle-gunshot-detection-technology/281-8f2d54a3-3a50-42aa-ae06-dfa527517b51
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Seattle police officers could soon be dispatched to emergency calls through new technology designed to detect gunshots. If approved by the city council, the program would establish the region's “first gunfire detection system.”</p> <p>Leon Griffin has called Rainier Beach in Seattle home for 30 years and he’s seen a thing or two in that time.</p> <p>“I’ve seen so much happening here on this corner, I could just about write a book I’ve seen so much damn stuff,” Griffin said.</p> <p>Soon new tech could assist Griffin's watchful eye and could help by sending police resources where they're needed.</p> <p>The program was outlined in Mayor Bruce Harrell's 2023-2024 Proposed Budget as a million-dollar investment in a "gunfire detection system," with the goal to "address the increase of gun violence in the city."</p> <p>“They can try it but it’s hard to say if it’s going to work but the only thing they can do is try,” Griffin said.</p> <p>While they have yet to announce the company that would be contracted, ShotSpotter holds a patent for the technology and is currently in 125 cities around the country.</p> <p>The so-called gunshot detection system, developed in the mid-’90s, uses sensors to detect loud noise and through an algorithm, determines if it’s a firearm. From that point, police are dispatched.</p> <p>In a statement to KING 5, Shot Spotter said the company will not comment on cities they are not currently operating in but adds that its system “is a critical part of a comprehensive gun crime response strategy that enables a fast, precise police response to help save the lives of gunshot wound victims and capture critical evidence at the scene.”</p> <p>In the budget proposal, the city says advocates point to many unsolved homicides in Seattle’s Rainier Beach area.</p> <p>The Seattle Neighborhood Group, a nonprofit working to create safer communities’ argues the money could be better spent somewhere else – fearing an overreaction by police responding to a computer and not a human call for help.</p> <p>“Research has shown that the effects of the shot shooter technology are damaging to communities of color. It’s unreliable and results in false alarms and conflicts within our communities,” said Cathie Willmore with the Seattle Neighborhood Group.</p> <p>ShotSpotter claims a 97% percent accuracy rate on its website.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Seattle firefighters: physical, verbal attacks
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/attacks-against-seattle-firefighters-leads-to-new-approaches-when-handling-calls#
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. — SEATTLE – Firefighters who face a disturbing number of physical and verbal assaults while on the job are now getting help from a coalition of city leaders.</p> <p>The Seattle Fire Department is working with the Seattle City Attorney’s Office and the Seattle Police Department to track the incidents and come up with safer ways to respond to calls.</p>

	<p>“We're looking at situations,” said Seattle Fire Chief Harold Scoggins. “We're trying to understand what's going a little bit sideways and modifying the actions that we take.”</p> <p>Threats and attacks were becoming so frequent the department developed a new system to track the incidents. It launched in April and is called the assault and threatening behavior incident report. Crews have been encouraged to file them every time they run into a serious conflict while on a call.</p> <p>“The last thing we want for our folks is for their safety to be compromised,” Scoggins said.</p> <p>One of the early findings is that calls for overdoses and seizures have a higher tendency to turn volatile, according to Seattle City Councilmember Lisa Herbold, who has been involved in the discussions. Having an automatic police escort at the outset could help.</p> <p>Police already often do join firefighters on overdose calls when available. A department spokesperson said the joint-response request likely won't put any additional burdens on the number of patrol units available to handle other emergency calls.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Metro drivers issue: crime, drug use on bus
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/king-county-metro-bus-drivers-crime-drug-use/281-4ef99b04-d2b9-43dc-a3a7-d9b938c9d090
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — A suspect accused of bringing Molotov cocktails onto a Metro bus was charged in a King County court after prosecutors "rush filed" the case.</p> <p>The incident is part of a larger issue on local buses. Drivers say crime and drug use is only increasing.</p> <p>Driving through the city can be a daunting task, now add in maneuvering a 40 or 60-foot bus carrying passengers.</p> <p>"It's really difficult to pay attention to what's happening behind you when you have all these factors in front of you that you're responsible for," said Bus Operator Johnathan Futch who has been with King County Metro for four and a half years.</p> <p>In that time Futch said he's filed about 15 to 20 incident reports.</p> <p>"One of the scariest moments was when the person was trying to get at me in the driver's seat," he said. He was also spat on at the beginning of the pandemic.</p> <p>"The N-word every day of my career behind the seats, more times than I'd like to say. Anything but my name," said Futch.</p> <p>Drug use and illegal activity is an issue that's only growing according to Ken Price who's the President of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 587 which represents Metro bus operators.</p> <p>"We always stay happy driving a bus because we get to say good morning and have a good day 200 times a day and that is infectious. We don't do that as much anymore," said Price.</p> <p>On Sept. 11, a metro passenger reported another passenger walked onto a metro bus holding two Molotov cocktails. Seattle police arrested the suspect, later identified as Robert Johnson after he got off the bus. He had the containers with him labeled "Romeo" and "Juliet".</p> <p>Johnson pleaded not guilty to possession of an incendiary device in court Wednesday.</p> <p>Price says one of the solutions to the ongoing issue is accountability for illicit activity on buses.</p>

	<p>"A little bit of enforcement will go a long way, the word will spread if you ride the bus and are held accountable to the Code of Conduct," said Price.</p> <p>Futch adds that it takes everyone's action.</p> <p>"Just know that your voice does matter. Call 9-1-1 and let them know what you see so they can report it."</p> <p>KING 5 reached out to King County Metro and they said since Johnson was arrested after leaving the bus, they don't consider it an incident. KING 5 requested incident reports from the past two years and is still waiting for that information.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Tacoma high school cleared after lockdown
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article266514256.html
GIST	<p>Mount Tahoma High School went into lockdown Wednesday after a student was reportedly seen with a firearm inside a bathroom. Tacoma police said officers cleared the school and found no firearms.</p> <p>Tacoma Police Department said in tweet that a fire alarm also was pulled at the school. Police said there were no reports of anyone injured or shots being fired.</p> <p>No one directly saw a student with a firearm, according to police and school officials. Police spokesperson Wendy Haddow said dispatchers received multiple reports at about 12:18 p.m. regarding a student with a gun. One student heard from another that they had seen a student with a gun, then reported this to the school's office.</p> <p>A total of 18 officers, including some from Lakewood Police Department, responded to the school. Haddow said students were locked in classrooms while officers searched the property.</p> <p>"The school and the students did it just like they trained to," Haddow said. "There's no substantiated threat right now, but that doesn't matter, they heard something, they said something, they followed the emergency preparedness drills and the school is cleared."</p> <p>Tacoma Public Schools spokesperson Kathryn McCarthy said after the fire alarm was pulled, the school was able to disable it and keep kids inside to maintain the lockdown while Tacoma Fire Department responded. Crews did not find any fire in the school.</p> <p>McCarthy said classes would continue in a modified lockdown through the rest of the day. She said some students left with their families. She said the school will continue to investigate and is working with police to try to determine who the student was who reportedly had a firearm.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/29 Border drug trafficking hits new records
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/fentanyl-crisis-continues-to-ravage-us-communities-border-drug-trafficking-hits-new-records-memo
GIST	<p>FIRST ON FOX – A memo circulating among Senate Republicans this week details how the fentanyl crisis continues to worsen across U.S. communities as southern border drug seizures and encounters reach record highs.</p> <p>At the border Those who have witnessed activity at the border believe the crisis at the border and the fentanyl crisis are correlated.</p> <p>"Yeah, I've never seen anything like this. The numbers, the organization, the movement. And the federal government is doing a masterful job of keeping it on the down-low as much as possible — santizing it</p>

as much as possible," retired Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agent and Texas congressional candidate Frank Lopez Jr. told Fox News Digital.

CBP agents seized an unprecedented 10,500 lbs. of the deadly drug in 2021, and seizures have already surpassed 12,000 lbs. so far this year — the most fentanyl ever seized in a single year in the United States. That much fentanyl could kill the entire U.S. population eight times over, the memo circulating among senators notes.

Last month, border encounters surpassed 200,000 for the first time. Meanwhile, agents seized a record 2,300 pounds of fentanyl at the southwest and coastal/interior U.S. borders last month, meaning the issue continues to worsen.

The number of migrants who have successfully crossed into the United States this fiscal year is on track to reach 2 million, with about 8,000 crossings per day.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told Fox News' Peter Doocey Aug. 31 the Biden administration has seen a "200% increase of fentanyl seizures, which means that we are ... doing the job of catching drug traffickers."

But with the increase in fentanyl seizures comes an increase in fentanyl coming into the country. In 2021, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) reported seizing more than 15,000 pounds of substances containing fentanyl and more than 20.4 million fentanyl-laced prescription pills. This year, DEA agents have recovered 20,000 pounds of fentanyl in the interior.

"Certainly me, having spent 30 years in Border Patrol, most of them in [the Del Rio Sector](#), I have never seen anything like this. I've never seen, not just the number of people, but the apparatus ... the organization that has gone into the structure of having everything in place to facilitate, expedite, with maximum efficiency, the number of people coming into our country," Lopez said. "We are pouring hundreds of millions of dollars ... into these soft-sided facilities, [where the] sole intent is to process and push through as many people as possible."

Across state lines

Drug overdoses led by fentanyl were the [No. 1 cause of death](#) for U.S. adults between the ages of 18 and 45 between 2020 and 2021, according to an analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data by the anti-fentanyl nonprofit Families Against Fentanyl (FAF).

U.S. life expectancy fell to its lowest point since 1996 in 2021 with 10% of the decline attributed to drug overdoses.

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) said in a February press release that the "unprecedented overdose epidemic" claims about 275 American lives per day.

Fentanyl is a deadly opioid that is about 50 times more potent than morphine. [Drug cartels](#) have latched on to the drug because it is powerful in small doses, meaning it is easier for smugglers to transport. It is also "highly profitable" and "easily avoids detection because of its small size," the memo circulating among senators notes.

Additionally, American children are dying more frequently from fentanyl poisoning because the opioid is appearing more and more frequently in disguised forms like prescription pills and "[rainbow fentanyl](#)." Kids unknowingly purchase drugs that they believe to be anything from Percocet to Xanax to even Advil that contains fentanyl. Disguising the opioid is an attempt by drug traffickers to hook kids on to the highly addictive opioid and make more money.

The majority of fentanyl that makes its way into the United States is manufactured in China or Mexico and then smuggled into the U.S. through the southern border, according to the DEA.

FAF founder Jim Rauh, who lost his son to fentanyl poisoning, described the fentanyl crisis to Fox News Digital earlier this month as "a slow-motion chemical weapon attack ... that's being perpetrated by China and a third opium war."

Overdose deaths, largely driven by fentanyl, have increased significantly in a number of states between April 2021 and April 2022, including Nevada, Colorado, Georgia and New Hampshire. That's after fentanyl poisoning deaths [doubled in 30 states](#) between 2019 and 2021, according to another FAF analysis.

New Hampshire overdose deaths have increased a whopping 29% between April 2021 and April of this year, according to the CDC. Colorado overdose deaths have surged nearly 16% over the same time frame. Georgia overdose deaths have risen 19%, and Nevada overdose deaths have increased 4.5%, CDC data shows.

In Congress

So, [what is Congress doing](#) to mitigate the fentanyl and border crises?

Republicans and Democrats have come together on some legislation authored to combat the crisis, such as the bipartisan Securing America's Borders Against Fentanyl Act, the Temporary Reauthorization and Study of the Emergency Scheduling of Fentanyl Analogues Act, the HALT Fentanyl Act and the Davis Cooper Act, among others

"Certainly, Democrats are now starting to work with us on these fentanyl issues. We have Sen. [Kirsten] Gillibrand and Sen. [Diane] Feinstein working with us on ... the Cooper Davis Act," said Sen. Roger Marshall, R-Kansas, who introduced [the Cooper Davis Act](#). That act would require social media companies to work with federal agencies to combat illicit drug sales on their platforms, told Fox News Digital.

But Marshall, who visited the border, and other Republicans are questioning why President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, his designated border czar, have not visited the southern border since taking office.

"Anything we can do to fight fentanyl poisoning — this epidemic — I'm for it," Marshall said. "It is just so sad that our president, though, turns his back on this. We're trying to put our fingers in the pie, do everything we can, but the root problem is that open border. Why this president won't admit that — why he won't go down there and secure this border — we have no idea."

In the White House

Jean-Pierre has said [the Biden administration](#) is making efforts to secure the border.

"We are securing the border," she told Doocy Aug. 31. "The fact that we are securing record levels of funding from DHS so they can stop illicit drugs from entering into the country — the fact that it's not just drug traffickers that we're dealing with ... we're stopping ... financiers. This is what's happening ... under this administration."

[The White House](#) press secretary added later that Republicans are "not" working with the administration to help Americans, including "kids," stop overdosing on dangerous drugs.

National Security Council (NSC) Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby also pointed Fox News' Jacqui Heinrich to the Biden administration's increased DHS funding when asked what is being done to secure the border on Sept. 22.

"We pushed for record levels of funding for DHS. Unfortunately, there wasn't the support there on the Republican side for that," Kirby said. "We are pushing forward advanced technologies, as I mentioned earlier, to try to alleviate some of the strain on the manpower down there on the southern border. And we are ... working to try to really get at the root causes for some of this migration in particularly the

	<p>Northern Triangle countries ... to help these countries create conditions that would help avoid people from having to flee."</p> <p>Experts recommend people who use any kind of drug carry Narcan, a lifesaving medicine also known as naloxone, which has the ability to reverse symptoms of an overdose and potentially save lives, according to Family First Intervention.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Report: 200 environmental activists killed
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/report-200-environmental-activists-killed-globally-2021-90674247
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY -- Some 200 environmental and land defense activists were killed around the world in 2021, including some 54 in Mexico, which assumed the position of the deadliest country in the annual report by nongovernmental organization Global Witness.</p> <p>More than three-quarters of the killings took place in Latin America, where Colombia, Brazil and Nicaragua also logged double-digit death tolls.</p> <p>It was the third consecutive year of increases for Mexico and a jump from 30 such activists killed in 2020.</p> <p>"Most of these crimes happen in places that are far away from power and are inflicted on those with, in many ways, the least amount of power," the report said.</p> <p>Global Witness considers its report a baseline, noting "Our data on killings is likely to be an underestimate, given that many murders go unreported, particularly in rural areas and in particular countries."</p> <p>The victims died fighting resource exploitation and in land disputes. Conflicts over mining were tied to 27 deaths worldwide, the most for any sector.</p> <p>Fifteen of those mining-related killings were in Mexico.</p> <p>In the western Mexico state of Jalisco, José Santos Isaac Chávez was killed in April 2021. He was running for local office and had made opposition to a long-running mine a central part of his campaign. Days before the election, he was found dead in his car, which had been driven off a cliff and his body showed evidence of torture. Armed men had dragged him out of his home and driven him away in his own vehicle.</p> <p>In April 2021, Sandra Liliana Peña Chocué, an Indigenous governor in southwest Colombia, who had fought for the eradication of coca crops in Caldon, Cauca was killed near her home by armed men. Her murder was condemned by the United Nations, nongovernmental organizations and foreign governments.</p> <p>Overall, killings of environmental activists in Colombia dropped in 2021 to 33 from 65 the year before. The Philippines saw fewer such killings in 2021 too, 19 compared to 30 in 2020.</p> <p>In the Democratic Republic of Congo, all eight recorded victims were killed inside Virunga National Park.</p> <p>In November, conservation park ranger Chief Brigadier Etienne Mutazimiza Kanyaruchinya, 48, was killed when 100 heavily armed men, presumed to be former members of the M23 rebel group, attacked a patrol post near the village of Bukima in Congo's North Kivu Province.</p> <p>Virunga Park is home to some of the world's last mountain gorillas, but armed groups such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, known by its French acronym FDLR, the Mai-Mai and the M23 regularly vie for control of eastern Congo's natural resources.</p>

	<p>Global Witness called on governments to enforce laws that protect activists and require informed consent from Indigenous groups, while also requiring companies to be accountable throughout their global operations and have zero tolerance for attacks on land defenders.</p> <p>“Activists and communities play a crucial role as a first line of defense against ecological collapse, as well as being frontrunners in the campaign to prevent it,” Global Witness CEO Mike Davis said in the report.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/28 Deadliest place for environmental activists
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/mexico-worlds-deadliest-spot-environmental-activists-90674044
GIST	<p>VICAM, Mexico -- Mexico has become the deadliest place in the world for environmental and land defense activists, according to a global survey released Wednesday, and the Yaqui Indigenous people of northern Mexico are still mourning the killing of water-defense leader Tomás Rojo found dead in June 2021.</p> <p>The murder of Indigenous land defenders often conjures up images of Amazon activists killed deep in the jungle — and Colombia and Brazil still account for many of the deaths. But according to a report by the nongovernmental group Global Witness, Mexico saw 54 activists killed in 2021, compared to 33 in Colombia and 26 in Brazil. The group recorded the deaths of 200 activists worldwide in 2021.</p> <p>Latin America accounted for over two-thirds of those slayings — often of the bravest and most well-respected people in their communities.</p> <p>That was the case with Tomás Rojo, who authorities claim was killed by a local drug gang that wanted the money the Yaquis sometimes earn by collecting tolls at informal highway checkpoints.</p> <p>Between 2010, when state authorities built a pipeline to siphon off the Yaquis’ water for use in the state capital, Hermosillo, to 2020, Rojo led a series of demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience, including a months-long intermittent blockade of the state’s main highway, which caused millions in losses for businesses and industry.</p> <p>People who knew Rojo don’t believe the toll money theory: They say he was killed by the powerful interests that stand to profit from the Yaquis’ land and water rights in the northern border state of Sonora, across the border from Arizona.</p> <p>“Tomás demonstrated his capacity as a natural leader. He was a descendent of warriors,” said Fernando Jiménez, who fought alongside Rojo in a movement to defend the tribe’s water after the government built a dam to divert Yaqui water to rapidly growing Hermosillo in 2010.</p> <p>Rojo’s body was found half-buried near Vicam, nearly three weeks after he disappeared. He was initially identified by a red neckerchief he had been wearing when he left home.</p> <p>Rojo was a descendent of Tetabiate, a Yaqui leader killed in a 1901 battle with the government, which deported the surviving Yaquis to work in slave-like conditions on henequen plantations in far-away Yucatan. The last battle against the Yaquis was fought in 1927, and included the government using airplanes against warriors still armed mostly with bows and arrows.</p> <p>In 2014, Sonora state authorities tried to arrest Rojo and Jiménez on what Yaqui leaders consider trumped-up charges of kidnapping — that were later dismissed; Rojo avoided capture and fled to Mexico City, but Jiménez was jailed in the state capital in Hermosillo. The two kept the movement alive by speaking in Yaqui language in prison telephone calls.</p> <p>“In prison, they made you speak Spanish,” recalls Jiménez. “They didn’t want me to speak my native language because they wanted to know what I was saying.”</p>

The Yaquis are the legal owners of at least half the water in the river basin that bears their name and which they have defended through nearly five centuries of massacres and extermination. But they have seen much of their water redirected to feed burgeoning industries and projects to plant vineyards and avocados in the desert.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador last month apologized to the Yaquis for past abuses and promised a series of infrastructure programs to improve their lives. But López Obrador has refused to stop the siphoning off of their water, though the director of the local water district, Humberto Borbón, says it is “100% illegal” and court rulings have backed the Yaquis’ position.

The Yaquis find themselves at the center of a perfect storm: Everybody from Mexican drug cartels to water-hungry lithium mines covet their land. But they themselves live in poverty and often don’t even have running water in their homes.

César Cota, a bricklayer and farmer who worked alongside Tomás Rojo, sat beside the Yaqui River — now just a dry gully — and recounted 500 years of Yaqui struggle.

Near his home, in the village of Cocorit, Yaqui warriors confronted Spanish conquistador Diego de Guzman in 1533.

“Our ancestors drew a line in the dirt and said, ‘If you cross this, you’ll be at war with us,’” Cota said. “Since then, we haven’t stopped fighting. By now, in 2022, we shouldn’t have to still be fighting.”

Cota said the river was crucial to the Yaquis. When it flowed regularly, sturdy reeds grew on its banks which the Yaqui used to build everything from houses to funeral biers.

“It’s an injustice, it’s a great sadness to see our river without water,” said Cota. “That river bears our name. That is where animals live, our medical plants, our reeds live. We don’t have reeds anymore.” When someone dies, relatives have to buy reeds to make their funeral bier.

“If this river were to flow again to the sea (the Gulf of California), that would be the greatest victory we could ever have,” Cota said.

Rojo’s father, Guillermo Rojo, 84, lives in the traditional Yaqui village of Potam. In the family’s humble home, almost everything — the fences, the walls, roofs, the sleeping mats and even the hearths — are made of woven reeds. Because of the semidesert landscape, the trees that grow here are small and twisted, so reed mats packed with mud serve as walls and cooking surfaces.

The elder Rojo recalled Tomás, his son, as “iron-willed ever since he was a young boy.”

“He didn’t forget where he was from, who his ancestors were, and that may be what led him to become a social activist.”

The family’s tradition is impressive: After Tetabiate — the elder Rojo’s grandfather — was killed in battle in 1901, the Mexican government sold the surviving members of his family off as slaves.

“When people ask me who my ancestors were, I tell them I am the descendant of slaves,” he said.

Even today, most Yaquis in Potam live in reed houses; only those wealthy enough to buy and operate small electric pumps have running water.

While some still farm the surrounding fields, most Yaquis work as gardeners, bricklayers or laborers in neighboring cities. They farm corn and wheat on only about 42,000 acres (17,000 hectares), because they don’t have enough water for irrigation, despite a 1930s presidential decree that guarantees them enough water to irrigate more than three times that much land.

That lack of water threatens the survival of Yaqui culture, whose traditional costumed Lenten-season dance performances are portrayed in statues across the state — even as the people themselves and their culture die off.

With little water, widespread poverty and no farm work available, younger Yaquis have begun to migrate to nearby cities and the U.S. border city of Nogales, and seldom return to fulfill their roles in traditional dances. Drug cartels moved in because they view Yaqui territory as a lucrative path to smuggle drugs to the U.S. And lithium deposits lie to the north of the Yaquis, and reportedly into their territory, as well.

“They have already granted about seven mining concessions in our territory, without ever having consulted us,” said Jiménez. “The violence started in our communities, with the rival gangs, abductions and everything led to a decline in Yaqui society. Addiction increased, with the use of methamphetamines undermining our young people.”

Rojo’s father shook his head and added, “Before, they tried to exterminate us with guns. Now they are trying to exterminate us with addiction.”

The drug violence unleashed in Sonora has cost many Yaqui lives. In September 2021, just a few months after Rojo was killed, one of the cartels apparently rounded up five young Yaqui men in the village of Loma de Bacum and massacred them.

The cartel had set up clandestine landing strips for drug flights on Yaqui land. When the Mexican army found and destroyed the landing strips, the cartel reportedly suspected the Yaquis of passing information on the runways to authorities.

The Yaquis say that isn’t true and that the young men were just innocent victims. Indeed, some still doubt the official identification of their remains.

But the Yaquis’ main complaints have gone unanswered by the government, which has defended the use of water for industrialization in Hermosillo, which has a huge Ford automotive plant and rapidly expanding industry and suburbs.

The Yaquis themselves won’t say who they think ordered the killing on Tomás Rojo; they live in a largely lawless state where a drug cartel, corrupt politician or powerful businessman can order such a murder with impunity.

“It’s like it is in every case, here in Mexico and everywhere else in the world,” said Jiménez. “Governments always tend to conquer the strongest leaders, the strongest voices disappear.”

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